



**THE**  
**CASE OF DOCTOR PLEMEN**

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CASE OF DOCTOR GUNN

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BY  
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"THE DETECTIVE'S MEMOIRS," "THE THUGS' TRIAL," "THE RED SPIDER"  
"THE DIVORCED PRINCESS," ETC. ETC.

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# CONTENTS.

## INTRODUCTION.

	PAGE
THE HOUSE IN THE RUE BOISSIÈRE . . . . .	I

## PART I.

CHAP.

I. THE "COUNTY TOWN" OF THE DEPARTMENT OF SEINE ET LOIRE . . . . .	23
II. ELIAS PANTON AND CO. . . . .	35
III. IN WHICH THE REV. J. THOMPSON SAVES THE HONOUR OF THE PANTONS . . . . .	56
IV. PROVINCIAL STRUGGLES . . . . .	78
V. HOW DR. PLEMEN IS VANQUISHED . . . . .	96
VI. THE BEAUTIFUL MRS. GOULD-PARKER . . . . .	117
VII. SUDDEN AMBITION . . . . .	132
VIII. "FROU-FROU" AT THE DEBLAINS . . . . .	144
IX. JENNY'S CONFESSIONS . . . . .	156

## PART II.

I. A COUNTRY ELECTION . . . . .	167
II. THE MYSTERY . . . . .	17

CHAP.	PAGE
III. IN WHICH THE EXAMINING JUDGE, M. BABOU, COMES FORWARD . . . . .	188
IV. PROFESSIONAL SECRECY . . . . .	204
V. THE HOUSE OF DETENTION . . . . .	227
VI. ON THE INFLUENCE, AS YET UNDISCOVERED, OF VERONESE GREEN ON THE HONOUR OF AN ARTIST . . . . .	241
VII. WILLIAM WITSON APPEARS AT VERMEL . . . . .	260
VIII. IN WHICH THE READER WILL AGAIN MEET ELIAS PANTON AND THE REVEREND JONATHAN THOMPSON . . . . .	279
IX. THE INVESTIGATION . . . . .	290
X. BEFORE THE HEARING . . . . .	316
XI. BEFORE THE JURY . . . . .	324
XII. BETWEEN DOCTORS . . . . .	352
XIII. AN UNEXPECTED EVENT . . . . .	369

## EPILOGUE.

WILLIAM WITSON'S SECRET . . . . .	389
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## THE

## CASE OF DR. PLEMEN



## INTRODUCTION

## THE HOUSE IN THE RUE BOISSIÈRE

It would have been difficult, anywhere in the whole town of Paris, to discover a more attractive-looking dwelling than that which bore the number 164 in the Rue Boissière, at Passy.

Through the bars of the iron railing which separated it from the public road might be seen a little garden luxuriant with roses and hydrangeas, and beyond, a pretty one-storied house in the Italian style, its walls almost buried in honeysuckle and Virginia creeper.

It suggested a shy retreat for lovers, for in it peace and quiet seemed to reign supreme, and its tranquillity was but rarely broken in upon by visitors from the outer world.

The interior of this charming little nest was as comfortable as the outside was attractive. It was not fitted up according to the cold, dry, symmetrical English notions of comfort, which, in the wealthiest houses in London, make you think of furnished lodgings—sometimes indeed of lodgings that have long stood empty—but with that warm Parisian comfort which is the envy and the despair of foreign imitators.

The severe style of the furniture in the large study told plainly enough that its occupant was a man, and a man of studious habits; but the dining-room with its bright flowers ever carefully tended, the drawing-room with its albums and artistic trifles, told as plainly that here dwelt a woman, youthful, and of exquisite taste, the soul of this peaceful home.

Indeed, it would sometimes happen that passers-by who had stopped only to look at the garden of the pretty town-house of the Rue Boissière, were struck with admiration at the sight of a young girl whose beautiful head would appear at one of the windows, as it were set in a frame of sweet-scented flowers.

The neighbours knew no more about this pretty young girl than that she was called Jane, was seventeen or eighteen years of age, seemed gentle and lovable, and that she lived there

with her father, Mr. William Witson, who, however, was supposed to be her father only by adoption.

Although Mr. Witson and Miss Jane spoke French with the utmost correctness, they were taken to be foreigners—either English or American. All attempts of inquisitive people to find out more about them had proved futile.

There were only two servants : a cook, who would perhaps have gossiped, had she had anything interesting to communicate, but who had entered Mr. Witson's service only when the latter arrived in Paris ; and a lady's-maid, who knew not a word of French, and never went out without her young mistress.

The house sheltered yet a fifth person, but she looked so forbidding, and was so reserved, that none would have ventured to ask her any questions. This was Mrs. Wanwright. She had been governess to Jane, to whom she was entirely devoted, and now remained with her as housekeeper and manager.

As to William Witson himself, he was a man of about forty years of age, strong and healthy-looking, with finely cut and high-bred features, and evidently a gentleman. Carefully shaven, except for his long fair whiskers, he had some-



thing about him of the French judge or the naval officer.

A very early riser, he would walk up and down the garden-paths from daybreak until Jane came to bid him good-morning and offer him her forehead for a kiss. He then withdrew into his study, and immediately set to work to look through his newspapers with somewhat of a hasty, anxious manner. He took papers from pretty much every part of the world, a large proportion of them dealing exclusively with legal and criminal questions, such as the *Paris Droit* and *Gazette des Tribunaux*, the *London Police News*, the *Berlin Juristische Blaetter*, the *Frankfort Freischütz*, the *Vienna Gerichtshalle*, and the *New York Illustrated Police News* and *Police Gazette*.

The great rapidity with which Witson ran through all these papers proved his entire familiarity with many different languages. He did not desert his labours until he sat down to breakfast with Jane, at ten o'clock. And then would begin the young girl's daily efforts to carry sunshine into the life of the man whom she called "her friend"—to draw him away from the brooding thoughts that seemed for ever to haunt his mind. For the most part, these attempts had but a momentary success.



Witson used indeed to listen with an affectionate smile to the admonitions of the young girl concerning the trying existence he led, and used to promise he would become more sociable and enjoy more amusement ; but very often his eye would be fixed on the pretty preacher with an expression of mingled pain and tenderness.

He seemed to be reproaching her with not understanding more clearly the aim and object of his life—with not seeing that her fate was as much affected by the result of his labours as his own.

And thereupon, no doubt with the intention of counteracting the deep feelings stirred up within him at such moments, Witson would again bury himself in his law reports, and devour the story of one of those crimes of which both the cause and the object are an insoluble mystery to the psychologist—crimes that can be explained only by the love of wickedness, whose authors, monstrous anomalies in the realm of morals, seem as it were irresponsible actors.

Probably that was not exactly what the stranger was anxious to find, for though reports of this kind could take up his attention for a short time, he soon threw the newspapers from him with a gesture of annoyance and disgust.

On such occasions nothing but one of Jane's affectionate caresses could pacify him.

Sometimes William would leave the house after a hasty lunch, and almost always alone.

On those days he went straight to the Law Courts. He was held in high esteem by many members of the Bench, so that he had every possible facility for closely following all important criminal trials.

Half hidden amongst the crowd—in spite of the seat reserved for him in the visitors' gallery near the judges—he would listen to every argument with the utmost attention.

It was evident that he went there in the capacity of a writer of books, or as a student of criminal law, for he held the maxim that, however abject might be the man who was struggling to save his honour or his life, he should never be exhibited as a spectacle for idlers and for women suffering from that form of nervous disease which is called morbid curiosity.

What specially struck those with whom our mysterious friend compared notes during the adjournment of the court, was not only his profound knowledge of law, of procedure, one might almost say of everything in general, but also his indulgence, his pity for the accused,

however great might be their crimes, or however plainly they might confess them.

"You cannot tell," was a favourite saying of his; "you can never tell! Just as often there is no more reason for accepting a prisoner's confessions than there is for believing in his denials. The ferment that arises in the mind of a person suddenly and completely isolated from all around, should be carefully taken into account. People do not sufficiently realize the physical tortures of imprisonment on suspicion, any more than they understand the mental anguish of a criminal investigation. In the clutches of a clever man of the law, harassed by questions which, in spite of their irrelevance, are repeated in a thousand different shapes, humiliated by his tormentor who has but one object—to find his criminal—and who, determined to find him in the man before him, assumes a hostile tone, confounds him, sets traps for him, snatches at his smallest utterance, and then dictates it to his clerk with the interpretation most in accordance with his own views;—I say that in the clutches of this relentless inquisitor the prisoner often loses his head, and then his contradictory answers, the rectifications he attempts, his explanations on second thoughts, are one and all set down as

so much evidence against him. If he defends himself with too much energy, it merely shows that he has clearly recognized the risk he is running—he has prepared for the struggle—he is trying to mislead the court. Proof positive that he is guilty. Does he grow indignant? Indignation of that sort is merely a farce, and shows that he is not worthy of the slightest sympathy. If, on the other hand, he stammers, hangs his head, changes colour, has nothing to say for himself, he betrays that he has clearly recognized how entirely futile would be any attempt at disproving the facts alleged against him. His guilt is self-evident. If he weeps, he is terror-stricken; if he laughs, he is a cynic."

Once fairly started on this subject, Witson never knew when to stop. His usual calmness forsook him, and his heightened colour betrayed that it cost him a considerable struggle to control the violent excitement working within him. It was especially that indispensable but cruelly dangerous auxiliary of justice—the medical jurist—that called forth his unqualified and almost savage condemnation.

"The most terrible part of the business is," he would continue, "when the Criminal Investigation Department call to their assistance one

of those scientists who are ready to sacrifice anything and everything to a system, who refuse to recognize anything outside their own theories, whose professional pride does not permit them for one single moment to doubt their own infallibility. They will allow ten innocent men to be condemned rather than make the slightest alteration in the arguments of their report. Sooner than acknowledge a blunder, they will invent chemical and physiological phenomena that are utterly irreconcilable with all the known laws of Nature."

And in connection with this special point, Witson would tell the story of a shocking miscarriage of justice a few years previously, the victim of which had been a young woman of Douai.

Accused of child murder, she was hunted down, arrested, thrown into prison. During two long months of solitary confinement she was incessantly worried and tortured by the investigating judge, threatened with the indefinite prolongation of her detention on suspicion unless she would confess, until at last the poor creature pleaded guilty. Committed to take her trial at the assizes, she was condemned to five years' imprisonment. But, less than three months after, she was delivered of a full-grown

child in the central prison of Melun. So that merely taking the dates supplied by the prosecution, the poor woman was four months gone with child at the very moment when she was supposed to have given birth to and to have killed her baby.

However, this palpable proof of innocence, or rather of the impossibility of the woman's guilt, did not in the least degree disturb the equanimity of the medical jurist or of the judges who had pronounced sentence upon her.

The doctor whom the prosecution had called in proved as plainly as that twice two is four, that they had to deal with a case of double pregnancy, of two distinct and independent conceptions—in one word, a case of what is called superfœtation, an occurrence which was by no means without precedent. Now this was a monstrous statement to make. It is true that isolated instances have been known among animals, especially horses, but the possibility of such a thing with human beings is greatly questioned. Moreover, without entering into details which would lead us out of our way, it is sufficient to point out that physiologists admit superfœtation to be possible only under special circumstances, which had not

marked the case of the woman in question. Besides all this, how can we possibly believe in the proper qualification of a medical practitioner who, when certifying that a woman has recently been confined, does not recognize that on the contrary it is a case of a five-months' pregnancy! There can be no question that the prisoner should at least have had the benefit of the doubt. But then, what would have become of the infallibility of judges and medical jurisprudence? The sentence was duly confirmed.

The authorities were, however, graciously pleased to shorten the term of imprisonment inflicted on the victim of this monstrous blunder.

When Witson had been induced thus to express his convictions concerning criminal investigation, he used to return home from the court more depressed than ever. For some days after, Jane's efforts to cheer him would remain fruitless.

And yet the dear child did her best, for she felt the deepest affection for her kind friend. At times she was afraid of betraying her feelings, because she had noticed an extraordinary circumstance: when she showed too much attention, he seemed to grow colder and more



reserved ; when, on the contrary, she neglected him a little, his tender regard for her became more apparent. He seemed to waver between the dread of being loved too much and the terror of not being loved enough.

An observer would have thought this man worshipped the child in Jane, and dreaded the moment when he must acknowledge to himself that she was a woman.

The truth is that William was desperately in love with the young girl whom he had taken under his protection ten years ago, and that he tried to conceal this affection as if he thought it a crime. Under a constant fear of betraying himself, he had repeatedly made up his mind to separate from her. But whenever the moment came for him to announce this decision to Jane, his courage had failed him. Consequently, no change had taken place in their daily life.

It was evident that this continuous struggle, and the determined silence he maintained, were no light burden to bear. And yet Witson turned a deaf ear whenever Mrs. Wanwright advised him to act differently.

When that excellent lady had informed him that his adopted daughter had given him her heart entirely, William had turned very pale. He exclaimed :

"I shall never dare to tell her the horrible secret which separates us. Her love would turn to hatred! I can do only one thing, I must keep silence, even though I were to suffer ten times what I suffer now. She is young, beautiful, well educated—and she is rich, because I have wealth to give her. Try to draw her thoughts away from me. Some day she will feel that she has met the man whom she really loves. That day will be the beginning of her happiness—I shall disappear, and my wrongs will be redeemed."

Jane knew nothing of all these mental struggles. She set down his uncertain temper and his fits of moroseness to his constant studies and researches, the purpose of which also was unknown to her. Meanwhile her love increased day by day, and in her innocence she never stopped to ask herself what might be the nature of her affection for him.

One thing, however, was quite clear to her: she could not have felt otherwise towards him. William Witson was all in all to her. She could quite well remember that she had not always dwelt under his roof. There still remained in her mind the vague recollection of a far-off time when she had been suddenly left alone in the world, abruptly separated from a

young woman who must have been her mother, and who had fondly clung to her and wept bitterly before she tore herself away.

When had this happened, and in what country? Here her memory failed her entirely, nor had she been able to obtain any information from her governess. Mrs. Wanwright put an end to all the young girl's inconvenient questions by assuring her that she had been with her only ten years, that it was Mr. Witson who had put Jane under her charge, and that consequently she could not possibly know anything of events that happened before her time.

Thereupon Jane had ventured to ask William Witson himself. But at her very first words he had interrupted her by saying:

"My dear child, you did not know your mother; you were too young when you lost her. You were left alone in the world, and that is why I took you in, adopted you, brought you up, and have always loved you and cherished you like a daughter. If I have succeeded in making you happy, do not ask to know any more!"

He seemed so much distressed that Jane had flung her arms round his neck and begged him to forgive her inconsiderate inquiries. From

that time forward she had given up all idea of fathoming the mystery that hung over her childhood, and she lived entirely in the present. There was one point especially that was constantly present to her mind.

She would ask herself with a kind of terror, and with very natural feminine curiosity, why he who was to her as a father travelled about from one country to another in the way he did, why he appeared at different places under different names, and why he would often, utterly regardless of danger, rush in and become an active participator in the most romantic adventures, as though he were driven by an irresistible sense of duty?

She remembered that five or six years ago he had left her in New York under the protection of Mrs. Wanwright, and had gone to Paris. Her letters to him at that time had been addressed to William Dow. Only last year, when he took her to Boston, he assumed the name of Charles Murray. To-day he was William Witson.

Which one among all these names was really his own? What could be the object of this strange restless existence, which was often gloomy and always mysterious?

The young girl was at a loss to guess, and

her uncertainty made her live in a state of continual anxiety. Moreover, she bore the constant strain of hiding her fears, for she could not bear the idea of hurting him who was so dear to her.

Such was the state of things in the elegant little home of the Rue de Boissière, when one morning William Witson, when he had scarcely begun his usual study of the papers, uttered an exclamation of surprise.

Jane laid down the album she held in her hands, anxiously asking what was the matter.

"It is very strange," answered the American, whose face betrayed the utmost interest. "Still, I really do not know that you will care to hear it. It is just an item of general news in the *Gazette des Tribunaux* here, such as these legal papers contain every day. But it so happens that I know the name of one of the persons concerned—a lady, and an American."

"I must not hear any more. I suppose?"

"By all means, if you wish it. I will read it out to you."

The account ran thus:—"We receive the following from Vermel: 'Our town, usually so peaceful, is in a state of the utmost excitement, in consequence of an event which as yet is surrounded by a good deal of mystery. A fortnight ago the wealthy factory-owner, Raymond Deblain,

who had appeared to be in excellent health, was found dead in his bed when his valet entered the room in the morning. One of our best-known doctors, being immediately sent for, could do no more than certify that life was extinct, and he attributed death to a sudden attack of *angina pectoris*. M Deblain's funeral took place in due course, and was attended by an enormous concourse of people. Now, suddenly, when the unexpected death of our lamented fellow-townsmen was beginning to fade from people's minds, the Public Prosecutor has ordered the body to be exhumed and to be conveyed to the operating-room at the School of Medicine. Dr. Plemen, whose reputation we need not dwell upon, has been instructed to make the post-mortem examination. It would seem, that mention has been made of poison, but it will be readily understood that the utmost reserve is laid upon us.

“ M. Deblain, who was barely five-and-forty years of age, enjoyed general respect. Three years ago he married a young and beautiful American lady, Miss Rhea Panton of Philadelphia, whose arrival in this town produced a considerable stir. Their home was a very happy one, and the house of the Deblains was always gay and full of visitors.”

The article concluded with the following paragraph :

"We must abstain from giving currency to the various reports concerning this event, both from respect for those suffering under a great affliction, and so as not to interfere with the course of the law."

"Then that is the lady whom you know?" asked Jane.

"I used often to see her when she was a child. I was great friends with the whole family."

"In Philadelphia?"

"Yes—that is the town." Witson changed colour as he stopped short, and used this expression instead of mentioning the name of Philadelphia.

The young girl had not noticed her friend's embarrassment, and she continued :

"Philadelphia! that name seems to call up confused recollections in my mind."

"Oh, we never went there," said the American quickly; and, evidently anxious to turn her from the train of thought she seemed likely to pursue, he added :

"To-morrow, or the day after, we shall know more about it. I will get all the Vermel papers. Poor little woman! A widow already! Why,



she cannot be more than twenty-one. Whatever could induce her father to marry her to a Frenchman, and a man twice her age? If there are no children, she will most likely return to America. However, we shall soon see."

During the next two days the three Vermel papers brought no particular news concerning M. Deblain's death. Twenty-four hours later, however, William Witson read in one of them an account which visibly made the deepest impression upon him :

"The eminent physician, Dr. Plemen, having come to the conclusion that M. Raymond Deblain was poisoned by means of verdigris, the Public Prosecutor ordered a search to be instituted in the town-house of our ill-fated townsman. The result of this search has proved so compromising for the widow, that the latter has been arrested. The whole town is in the utmost consternation. People refuse to believe in the guilt of Madame Deblain, for her husband worshipped her, and the young couple were very happy together. The Public Prosecutor, and M. Babon, the investigating judge conducting the case, are universally blamed for their hasty action.

"As for Dr. Plemen, the mission entrusted to him must have been doubly painful, for not

only was he the closest friend of the man who is the victim in this tragedy, but the hospitable house in which reigned the beautiful Madame Deblain was almost his second home. But a man like Dr. Plemen does not hesitate to obey the call of duty. The eminent physician has set a noble example of professional self-denial.

"We shall not say any more for the present, since we do not mean to repeat the romantic rumours which have been put in circulation concerning Madame Deblain. She is kept in solitary confinement, rigorously enforced, in the prison called the Carmelite Convent.

"We shall carefully watch every stage of the inquiry, and keep our readers fully informed."

Witson had read this account over repeatedly, every now and again interrupting himself with the exclamation :

"Why, it's not possible! How can the daughter of my old friend Panton be guilty of such a crime?"

He jumped up, and walking up and down his study with long strides, he murmured to himself :

"What a startling coincidence! A case of poisoning by verdigris, and supported by so learned a toxicologist as Dr. Plemen! The man

must be mistaken. I am determined to know more about this business, if only for the sake of the poor woman's father."

Here he was interrupted by Jane, who eagerly inquired if there were any news from Vermel.

Witson gave her all the details, and concluded by saying:

"I shall start this evening."

"Going to leave me again?" said Jane, and, however gentle, there was something of a reproach in her words.

"I must. I owe it to my fellow-countryman Panton. Of course the accusation against his daughter is a mistake from beginning to end."

He had taken her hands in his own, and was trying to comfort her. But Jane continued:

"It is a great trial to me every time you go away. A few years ago, when you left me in America and went to Paris, I only felt very sorry. But last year, when you went out among the Sioux Indians to procure evidence against Gobson, I was in a state of constant terror at the risks you were running. What would become of me if an accident happened to you? I believe I should die."

As she spoke, Jane rested her sweet girlish head on her friend's shoulder.

"My dear child," answered Witson, making a strong effort to appear calm, "you see that this time there is nothing of the kind. Vermel is only at a few hours distance from Paris. I shall not run any danger, and who knows whether this expedition will not lead me to the end of my trouble, which I have not sufficiently concealed from you? May it turn out to be the last of my trials!"

"And the last of mine," murmured the young girl blushing, but speaking so softly that William heard as it were only with his heart.

The next morning, having procured such letters of introduction as he thought necessary, he left Paris.

## *PART I*

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### CHAPTER I

#### THE 'COUNTY TOWN' OF THE DEPARTMENT OF SEINE ET LOIRE

M. RAYMOND DEBLAIN, the rich factory-owner at Vermel, had started for North America with purely business intentions. He meant to settle certain points that had caused litigation for several years past, and to take the opportunity of extending his connections on the other side of the ocean. He had been gone barely three months, when suddenly the rumour spread in his native town that he had got married in Philadelphia.

At first people refused to believe a word of this news, for, knowing what they did concerning his views and habits, it seemed not only unlikely, but really incredible.

Raymond Deblain had reached his forty-first

year without ever expressing any intention of taking a wife, at least in the accepted sense of the term. The awkward mishaps that had befallen some of the husbands he knew, made him congratulate himself again and again on having remained a bachelor. Consequently, it was in vain that the choice lay open to him among the prettiest heiresses of the department. For he was a very good match: a handsome fellow, rich, just a little bit free and easy perhaps in his manners, but a delightful companion, full of go and of high spirits.

During the Franco-German war, although no longer liable to serve, he had immediately enrolled among the volunteers, and the medal he had earned exactly suited his style and appearance, making him look more than ever like a retired cavalry officer.

In one word, he was an excellent specimen of that very pleasant type—the provincial man of the world. Elegant, jovial, sceptical, and fond of chaff, he yet managed never openly to offend the prejudices or the narrow-minded notions of his neighbours.

Really, it was utterly unlikely that M. Deblain would make such a sudden and entire change in his whole existence, and that, too, in favour of some "Miss" with all her eccentrici-

cities; for such is the notion too often entertained in France, especially in the provinces, concerning the maidens of the United States.

Those of his friends, therefore, who knew his taste for independence, his love of easy pleasures and of merely transitory love affairs, treated the whole of this outlandish marriage as a preposterous invention.

Supposing "le beau Raymond," as he was always called, had really intended to get married and settled, would he not simply have chosen one of the fair ones in his own town? Surely, he could never have overlooked the fact that at Vermel there were ten, twenty charming young girls of good family and with handsome fortunes, and that amongst them he had but to choose!

Besides, was it at all probable that he would ever have got married without consulting his bosom friend—his *alter ego*, Dr. Eric Plemen? Would he have done such a thing without asking his friend's permission, or without, at any rate, telling him of it beforehand?

For more than ten years the two men, Deblain and Plemen, had been inseparable. This is easily explained. Though they followed different vocations in life, they had exactly the same tastes, defects, and good



qualities. Both understood exactly how to make serious work and the most worldly amusements keep pace with each other.

Each of them owned a house in the Boulevard Thiers—almost every provincial town has a Boulevard Thiers or an Avenue Thiers—and not only so, but the two houses joined each other. The large and well-kept gardens behind these houses were connected by a door, and as both Eric and Raymond had a key, they could run in and see each other whenever it suited them, at any hour of the day or the night, without even the servants knowing anything about it.

The great manufacturer, intelligent and active, never neglected his business. Dr. Eric Plemen was not only a very able medical man, devoted to his patients and open-handed with the poor, but he was a scientist of the first rank, and had already established his fame as a toxicologist.

Several of his treatises had carried off the prize awarded by the Academy of Medicine. Vermel was very proud of him, but at the same time much surprised that a man of his weight should not have gone to Paris. There could be no doubt that in the capital he would have taken a high place among the members of the faculty.

It was during the late cholera epidemic that he had been sent down to the principal town of the Seine et Loire, and now it was ambition, so people supposed, which kept him there.

During several months he had fought against the scourge with an amount of self-devotion which almost amounted to heroism. He had won golden opinions from all, and thereupon, no doubt considering that this great industrial centre would offer him a good field, he had settled there, and had rapidly acquired an excellent practice.

A member of the Legion of Honour, head-physician to the hospital, with a seat in the departmental Board of Works, he nursed the ambition of being one day sent as deputy to the Chamber, to swell the ranks of those medical men the presence of some of whom in Paris is no doubt of the utmost benefit to their patients in the provinces—but which seems at the same time to point rather pathetically to the serious condition of our poor country. A swarm of leeches at the sick woman's bedside, doing their utmost, dose upon dose, to physic her out of existence.

As to his outward man, Eric Plemen presented a fine specimen of the handsome Slavonian, for he was not a Frenchman. He

was thirty-six years of age, with an intellectual face, eyes of fire, full sensual lips, and a quick ardent temperament.

Born in Hungary, but educated in Paris, he had distinguished himself as a student, and had finally taken the highest honours at the medical faculty of the University of France. Having become a naturalized subject, he had entered the profession. At Vermel, where he had come to settle in consequence of the chain of circumstances which we know, people were only too glad to have secured so able and so faithful a practitioner.

In character he was ambitious, determined, and had a very strong will. He did not admit that there was such a thing as a difficulty that could not be overcome, if a man had once made up his mind to reach a certain goal. He had furnished more than one proof of his creed by experiments and operations which had fortunately up to that moment always proved successful, and had thus justified his audacity.

Accordingly, he had an unlimited influence over his friend Raymond, who was a good fellow, easily led, and would consult the doctor about everything, even concerning details in the manufacturing of his goods.

But when the merchant had done with

business, and the medical man with his professional labours, the two met on common ground. They gave themselves up entirely to pleasure, and it would have been difficult to say which of them was the better man at the card-table, at a dinner-party, as a huntsman, or which of the two was the best judge of a pretty woman's smile. They managed, however, to keep within bounds, and quite understood how to practise just that little bit of hypocrisy which life in the provinces lays even upon those who are pretty careless as to what people say about them.

Besides, it was only the echo, so to speak, of their little escapades that reached Vermel. M. Deblain had a branch establishment of his firm in Paris. He paid frequent visits to the capital, and Dr. Plemen would join him there in his elegant bachelor's lodgings in the Boulevard Haussmann. About four or five miles from Vermel the great manufacturer possessed, moreover, a very fine country-house. It stood in the centre of its own grounds, and the dense shrubbery of the plantation protected it from the indiscreet gaze of outsiders. The house-keepers, a man named Ternier and his wife, who looked after this country-seat, which was modestly called "The Lodge," but to which the

young folk of Vermel had given the romantic name of "La Tour de Nesle"—these two good people seemed to have no eyes, never gossiped, and were certainly not to be bribed. Such were the two friends. And now, to make the news still more improbable, folks said that one of these Siamese twins, M. Deblain, the son of a clerical and orthodox family, had married a Protestant.

Consequently, no one could or would believe in this match. Dr. Plemen, being questioned by everybody, merely shrugged his shoulders, for he had not received the slightest hint from his friend Raymond. On the contrary, in a long letter of recent date Raymond had dwelt with the utmost satisfaction, with his usual high spirits and a touch of irony, upon the liberty which young girls enjoy according to American notions, and upon his flirtation with a certain Miss Rhea Panton, the daughter of a great manufacturer of Philadelphia, an old-established business connection of Deblain's.

It therefore appeared quite impossible to him, not that Deblain had changed his opinions—he was too well aware of his friend's want of energy, his easy temper, and his impressionable mind—but that he would have gone so far in this social revolution without at least informing

him of it as soon as the absurdity was committed.

Accordingly, he waited patiently and let the world talk, satisfied that a word from his friend would soon enable him to contradict this gossip from America, or that the traveller would himself disprove it by returning as he had gone—a bachelor.

And now, before going any further, we will here explain incidentally that our readers must not look on the map of France for either the town of Vermel or the department of the Seine et Loire; because some of them may feel concerned as to the reproaches of ignorance in geography that are flung at us so freely by our enemies on the other side of the Rhine, just as they accuse us of immorality—they, the manufacturers of transparent photographs—Augeas attending to the cleaning of other people's stables.

The two names are merely imaginary, invented for the purpose of giving us entire liberty in our narrative. Whilst putting on the stage provincial types taken from life, whilst subjecting abuses and judicial stupidity to the severest criticism, whilst unmasking political cowardice and hypocrisy, we are yet anxious not to incur reproaches which might seem to a certain degree well deserved.

We are compelled by the nature of the drama we are about to relate to lay the scene of it in a town large enough to be the seat of a high court of justice. Were we not to choose an imaginary spot, we should run considerable risk either of reproducing personages really existing in such and such a town, or of seeing our strictures cleverly twisted and disfigured, and perhaps applied, by the very people whom they most nearly concern—to men whom, on the contrary, we admire and respect.

And here may we be allowed to take the opportunity of dwelling upon a point of some importance.

No doubt an author does not always draw upon his imagination solely. His inspiration is often supplied by a phase of society which he has studied, by an event that he has witnessed, by characters or foibles that have been displayed before him; but that social phase, that fact, those characters and weaknesses, are merely motives, materials, germs, which he has to establish, classify, and to co-ordinate and develop in logical sequence.

Anxious to create a type entirely in harmony with the adventures he means to bring upon the stage, he no more photographs an individual, good or bad, than he copies literally the situa-



tion which, having made a deep impression upon him, supplied him with the original outline of his work.

Whatever may be his virtues or his vices, man is rarely complete; the novelist is compelled, by the exigencies of his case, to make his hero neither worse nor better than he really was. It so happens that real events are sometimes so oddly linked together by chance, they are so often the proof that truth is stranger than fiction, that the reader would actually not believe a story in which the effects—as it frequently happens in Nature—appeared to be anything but the direct results of the causes.

The writer, therefore, who has a definite object in view, and tries to reach it by logical means, borrows from each one of the models presented to him some of their faults and some of their good qualities, in order to create characters that exactly fit the circumstances he means to represent.

If it does happen that in these fictitious characters certain individuals really in existence are recognized, the explanation usually is, not that the novelist has simply taken a portrait from life, but that Nature has had the fancy, once in a way, to produce an entity as complete as the writer has imagined it.

In these cases of accidental agreement, the advantage is all on the side of truth : let him wear the cap whom it fits.

Now, to return to Vermel and the sensation produced by the mere supposition of Raymond Deblain's American marriage.

As we have already stated, people obstinately refused to admit the possibility of an event which upset so many cherished notions, and a goodly number of matrimonial speculations. Dr. Plemen especially would not hear of such a thing. However, one fine morning doubt became no longer possible ; for, scarcely a month after the news which had so greatly disturbed his friends, M. Deblain returned to his native city, accompanied by the young lady whom he had most undoubtedly married on the other side of the Atlantic, under the extremely odd circumstances we are about to relate.

## CHAPTER II.

ELIAS PANTON AND CO.

RAYMOND DEBLAIN was by no means a novice on the sea when he embarked in one of those magnificent steamers of the Transatlantic Line which easily accomplish the voyage from Havre to New York in less than nine days. Not that he had doubled the Cape of Good Hope or sailed through the Straits of Magellan ; but he had been southward as far as Algiers and Egypt, and, in the north, he had visited Stockholm and Copenhagen. Now, though the Mediterranean as a rule behaves fairly well to those whom it bears on its waters, such is by no means the case as regards the Channel and the North Sea, where storms are just as frequent and as violent as they can possibly be in those latitudes that are reputed the most dangerous.

Consequently, Dr. Plemen's friend had his sea-legs on, and cut by no means a poor figure

on board the *Pereire*. He thoroughly enjoyed the passage, and arrived in America in robust health and in excellent spirits.

He spent a week in New York, the "Imperial City," as the Yankees call it. The noise and turmoil of Broadway did not entirely take his breath away, nor was he overcome more than might have been expected by the sight of the famous Brooklyn bridge. However, he did not omit the regulation visit to Barnum's Museum, nor the time-honoured excursion to the Falls of the Passaic, and afterwards he took the train to Philadelphia.

He had announced his arrival to Mr. Panton, the great merchant, for, in coming to America, his special object was to visit this gentleman.

The connection between the houses, Deblain of Vermel, and Panton of Philadelphia, was of old standing; it had been established by the fathers of the present heads of the two firms.

For more than a generation they had exchanged their goods, in virtue of the maxim which, though mostly false, is very fortunately put into practice—it being the mainspring of a great many international business transactions—that "nothing is good but what comes from some other country."

The French, especially, are very fond of this notion, or at least they talk as if they were.

Just try, if you can, to persuade our dandies who so often make themselves ridiculous by their extraordinary "get-up," that a *tailleur* of the Boulevard des Italiens would make their clothes just as well as a *tailor* of Regent Street, or that a shoemaker's wares would be none the worse, though his name did not happen to have the magic termination *ker*, *kof*, or *ky*. Get one of our frail and fashionable young ladies to believe, if you can, that her dog may be of excellent breed, and yet not be called *Charlie* or *Polly*!

Just try to convince those who are smitten with the mania for foreign things that Swedish gloves are manufactured in France—as are English note-paper, Havannah cigars, Madeira wine, and ever so many other articles labelled with grand names; and that lovely Fatima is of the tribe of Beni-Batignolles—that is, that her fathers may be dwellers in the East, but that their tents have never been pitched farther eastward than Whitechapel.

Could the name of a tenor end with anything but the sacred letter *z*, though he should happen to be born in the Place Maubert or in Bloomsbury Square?—Nicholas, Niccolini. And is not

a foreign accent almost sufficient to prove to the Parisian public that you are a genius?

Three or four years ago, at the time of the great invasion from Toulouse, some knowing people learned the Gascon dialect. There were certain words of the *Langue d'Oc* that came to be just as powerful as the "Open Sesame" of old.

It was this very principle that formed the great connecting link between the houses of Panton and Deblain—the principle of being foreign, of coming from a long distance. Consequently, it was merely logical that Mr. Panton should prepare a very cordial welcome for Raymond Deblain, a man coming from France.

At that particular moment the Panton family consisted of the said Elias Panton, its head, of his wife, Bertha, and their two daughters, Jenny and Rhea; of Mrs. Panton's brother, the Rev. Jonathan Thompson; and the son of the latter, a tall youth of about five-and-twenty, who, partly from vocation and partly from a feeling of obedience, followed the same profession as his father.

Jonathan was a lanky individual, as wearisome and wire-drawn as a long day's fast. He invariably wore a tight-fitting black overcoat, buttoned right up to the chin, like a cassock,

and only slightly displaying the stiff white collar, which gripped his crane's neck like a vice.

Above this appeared a cadaverous hatchet-face, always close shaven. His air was sanctimonious, his eyes colourless, with no particular expression, shaded by large bushy eyebrows, while his most amiable smile could not conscientiously be described as anything but a grin.

His long ape-like arms terminated in huge hands of "hirsute proportion," to borrow a phrase from Sir Walter. This human monument of eclectic architecture had for its base enormous feet, always cased in heavy shoes, and for its summit a high hat, from under which escaped a few red locks of hair, and with a brim of such width as to afford its owner complete shelter from either sunshine or rain.

This worthy individual was one of the most indefatigable commentators of the Bible ever produced by the right of free inquiry—that right which is both the reason of Protestantism and one of its results.

In consequence of exercising this privilege and of forgetting the proverb which teaches us to "let well alone," the Rev. Jonathan had come to his sixteenth stage of religious reform.

He had been by turns a Presbyterian, a



Methodist, a Unitarian, a Puseyite—but so decided a Puseyite that his friends felt sure he was on the verge of Romanism—a Quaker, and one of the “Peculiar People.” Just at the time when we present him to our readers he was showing great leanings towards Swedenborgianism, and was beginning to relate, like the celebrated Swedish dreamer, his interviews with God and the angels. Thus, it seemed plain that he would end either as a madman or an atheist.

Like the worthy Jonathan, his son Archibald was tall and thin; he had tow-coloured hair, and was a grave and bold interpreter of Holy Scripture; consequently there were, between father and son, endless theological discussions. The reverend gentleman affirmed that his worthy son would be one of the great lights of the Reformed Church; but meanwhile he was urging him on to marry his cousin Rhea, with whom he was in love, and who would have a good fortune, a thing by no means despised by these Thompsons, clergymen though they were.

Elias Panton, the head of the family, was a stout man of about sixty, rosy, strongly built, and, to the great despair of his brother-in-law, not a member of any temperance society, but

fond of good living ; he was very practical, yet straightforward and honourable in business, as many Americans are, notwithstanding what any one may say to the contrary ; and, to express ourselves as Americans do when they are speaking of a man's fortune, he was worth a good million of dollars.

Mrs. Panton was a tall, thin, perfectly insignificant person, who, having been born of a Puritan family, had never known anything of worldly pleasures, and had no taste for elegance of dress or surroundings ; she was very clever, however, at making plum-puddings and pumpkin pies, and she had the greatest admiration for her brother Jonathan, of which admiration he took too frequent advantage, by dragging her away from her household cares, in order to expound to her a verse of the Bible, or to relate to her his latest Swedenborgian vision.

As to the girls Jenny and Rhea, whose respective ages were nineteen and eighteen, they were most perfect and charming specimens of American female education, and of that rapid civilization to which the United States owe their wonderful development in the last half-century.

Both were very pretty and very daring ; having perfect confidence in themselves, they were

very free in manner, yet perfectly good and modest; hardly looked after at all by their father, who perfectly trusted to their precocious wisdom as to their choice of husbands—for Rhea would not tolerate the idea of marrying her cousin, just as her sister by her coldness drove to desperation a certain Colonel Barnaby Gould-Parker, an ambitious, rough soldier, who had asked her ten times to marry him; left perfectly free, also, by their mother, who did not dare to find the least fault with them, although they were very respectful to her, and receiving with bursts of laughter the mystical communications of their uncle Jonathan; they had, in Philadelphia, the name of being the liveliest girls and the most daring horsewomen that could be met anywhere.

To complete the picture of the two charming daughters of Elias, we must mention the boundless affection which united them to each other, the interest each took in the other's tastes and pleasures, notwithstanding the great difference that existed between their dispositions and characters.

Rhea especially, who was bolder and more outspoken than Jenny, had the most ardent affection for her sister, and would certainly have sacrificed for her, not only all the Archi-

balds and all the colonels in the world, but any other affection whatever, if it could have contributed to her happiness. If any one tried to be complimentary to her and did not include Jenny, she would instantly turn her back on the unlucky man.

The Misses Panton had a sort of governess or companion, who was supposed to go out with them. She was a Miss Gowentall, a stout woman of about forty, and excessively near-sighted; but most frequently the poor woman lost sight of the girls as soon as they were out of the house, and she nearly always sought for them in a diametrically opposite direction to that they had taken. She would hunt for them for hours, sometimes in company with the Rev. Jonathan and his son Archibald, whom the girls' conduct scandalized, and who would profit by the occasion to deliver one of their sermons.

Jenny and Rhea were both elegant-looking girls; they spoke French very correctly, closely followed French fashions, and, if they had not married long ago, it was merely because they thought they would some day get their father to take them to Paris, where they were persuaded they would find husbands to suit them, thanks to their beauty and their fortunes of a hundred thousand dollars apiece.

Unfortunately for the ambition of his daughters, Elias Panton turned a deaf ear to this plan of theirs; and Jenny, warm-hearted and romantic, was getting tired of waiting, whilst her sister, cooler and more practical, was content to wait for a good chance, taking care, however, to keep out of the way of her sallow, dismal-looking cousin.

Things were just in this condition when the American manufacturer informed his daughters of the arrival of Raymond Deblain, his Vermeil correspondent and his friend, although he had never seen him. Like a true Yankee, who never forgets his own interests, Mr. Panton told his children and his wife, as well as his brother and nephew, that he should expect them to make things pleasant for his guest.

The lanky Mrs. Panton thought immediately of preparing some gastronomic surprise for the Frenchman; the honourable Jonathan asked if he belonged to the Protestant Church, to which question Elias replied by shrugging his shoulders; and the pretty girls, without even asking if their father's friend were young or old, thought only of proving to him that American girls were neither less charming nor less fashionable than Parisians.

These were the various ideas of the different members of the family, when the carriage which Raymond Deblain had taken at the Wilmington Station brought him to the door of the very handsome house in which Elias and his family lived, in Walnut Street; the street in Philadelphia in which are most of the banks and high-class business houses. The head of the house of Panton & Co. had telegraphed to M. Deblain on his arrival at New York, that his room was ready for him under his roof, and that it had been so ever since M. Deblain's departure from Havre; and Dr. Plemen's friend, who soon had had enough of American hotels, which are immense caravanserais, in which people live quite in public, had hastened to reply to his correspondent that he would gladly accept his hospitality.

Very soon after his arrival in the large hall of Mr. Panton's house, the manufacturer of Vermel had made acquaintance with all the family, whom Elias introduced to him, having first introduced himself. It was done in the coolest way possible, in such a way as to put Raymond Deblain quite at his ease, even though it took him a little by surprise.

"My wife," said the rich Yankee, in a curious kind of French, "an excellent housewife, who,

I am sure, will let you want for nothing ; my brother-in-law, the Reverend J. Thompson, who, if you will allow him, and perhaps whether you allow him or not, will try to convert you ; my daughters, Jenny and Rhea, two madcaps, whose only thought will be to find out from you the newest French fashions, and to procure for you every possible amusement ; lastly, my nephew, Archibald Edward Thompson, one of the future great lights of the Protestant Church, according to his father."

Raymond Deblain bowed respectfully to Mrs. Panton ; distrustfully to the reverend gentleman and his son, who bowed to him as if they were automata, not a muscle of their shaven faces betraying the least feeling ; and he warmly returned the clasp of the two girls, who smilingly gave him their hands.

The same day Elias introduced his guest at his club, the Union Reform Club. The young ladies sang to him, after dinner, with the most comical expression, half a dozen songs from the " Little Duke " and the " Little Bride," instead of the hymns which their uncle had devoutly brought to the piano ; and, when the guest of the Pantons went up to his room, he found, besides the cup of tea with which his hostess had provided him, a pretty little Bible, the first



landmark towards conversion, placed there by the Reverend Jonathan himself.

The next day, and during the week, our hero, who was very much interested in American manufactories, visited with Elias all the most important ones of Philadelphia, Burlington and Camden, the two manufacturing towns which stand on the left bank of the Delaware. He devoted himself entirely to the business which had brought him to America; but soon after that Jenny and Rhea took possession of him, and then there was nothing for Raymond but pleasure parties, in which the younger of the sisters decidedly took the lead.

Almost every morning he rode with them, and it was fortunate that he was a good horseman, for hardly had they reached Fairmount Park, or the banks of the Wissahickon, the usual riding-ground of the people of the city, than they would set off at a mad gallop, during which Rhea took a wicked pleasure in terrifying him by her recklessness.

Sometimes, accompanied by Miss Gowentall, the girls would go with M. Deblain on one of the small steamers down to the Point, where the Schuylkill enters the Delaware, at the termination of the great peninsula on which stands Philadelphia, with its streets ten miles long,

running north and south, and cut at right angles by other streets going east and west; its three hundred churches and six thousand factories; or they would go down to the verdant Windmill island in the middle of the river, or up the magnificent water-course to Wilmington and return by rail.

Then it generally happened that the worthy governess, having no less horror of water as a means of locomotion than as a beverage, the moment the boat started took refuge below, and the two pretty girls were as much as ever alone with M. Deblain, who was perfectly charmed with their youthful gaiety.

Then there were the theatres—all the theatres, great and small, which he must see; the dinner-parties which Elias gave in honour of his guest; the dances, at which the friend of Dr. Plemen was constantly the partner of the two girls; the frequent suppers at the Belmont Mansion—in fact, such endless amusements that Raymond retired at night quite delighted, but worn out with fatigue, and wondering whether or not his young friends were made of iron, to be able to endure such a life.

On these particular nights he used to fall asleep without thinking of opening any of the little Bibles, black, red, blue, or green, which

were accumulating in his room—placed under his pillow by the Rev. Jonathan, who sometimes would stop him to say, in prophetic tones: "He who is not with me is against me;" "Woe to the man by whom evil cometh," &c.—Biblical maxims which M. Deblain thought excellent, but of which the frequent and monotonous repetition made him compare the lanky clergyman to one of the sandwich-men who go about the low parts of London with their boards exhorting sinners to repentance. Thus the pitiless Thompson wore himself out in vain endeavours, merely because his brother's guest was generally thinking of nothing but the last smile or hand-clasp he had received from the younger daughter of the stout Elias; for it happened inevitably that, notwithstanding his experience and his forty years, our hero felt greatly attracted by Miss Rhea—not that he was passionately in love with her, but he found her most amusing, and felt all the pleasure an old bachelor can in the easy intimacy in which he was living with a pretty girl of less than twenty, who was gay and witty, who treated him as a friend, and who was not the least angry if he held in his hand a few moments longer than was necessary the little foot by which he helped her to mount her horse; or if he pressed

her a little too close to him in waltzing; and who would laugh merrily, like a woman who understands a jest, when he murmured in her ear some gallant speech.

Every morning he sent to each of the sisters, by their maid, a handsome bouquet, and each would place a flower from it in her dress; but Jenny would only thank him by a pleasant word, while Rhea completed the expression of her gratitude by fastening a rose in his button-hole.

Raymond had thus come to flirting, and it was just then that he wrote to his friend Plemen:

"These American girls are really the most adorable creatures in the world; quite like Parisians, but with more frankness and sincerity, and less of mannerism. One would think they were born for nothing but pleasure, and that their gay lives could never have any dark days in them! It is delightful here, for neither father nor mother is watching you; nor aiming to catch you as a son-in-law. I go about with the two charming daughters of Elias Panton without either the public or himself finding the least fault, because it is done every day; nor does their mother say a word, and she takes as

much care of me as if I were a boy, and her own son.

"There is no shadow to the picture except a certain Miss Gowentall, the companion of the Misses Panton—but I wish you could see how they ignore her—and a very strict clergyman, their uncle, who is anxious to make of me a disciple of Swedenborg, and who slips little Bibles into my pockets, to the intense amusement of his young nieces.

"He is a second and grotesque edition of my aunt Dusartois. Ah, by the way, how lost she would think me, if she knew what a life I am leading here, in the midst of these heretics, and constantly associating with two such pretty madcaps!

"One of them especially, Miss Rhea, is lovely; and, zounds, if I had not made a vow of celibacy! But there, I must content myself with being very friendly with the sweet girl, who has lovely blue eyes, red lips, a complexion of lilies and roses, pearly teeth, a wasp-like waist, raven hair, and the wit and fun of a perfect little demon!

"Very soon, however, I shall have ended my business here, and, although I like Philadelphia, I do not forget Vermel nor my old friends. I certainly shall take away with me a very pleasant

remembrance of Miss Rhea, who, I think, likes me very well, in spite of my forty years; but in our own good town pretty faces are not wanting, which will drive her out of my head. It is not in America that one should forget that liberty is the greatest of all blessings—so hurrah for Liberty!”

It will be seen by the tone of this letter that Raymond Deblain, although he found the Panton girls very much to his taste, had no idea of breaking through his vow of celibacy; consequently, he now and then thought with compunction of the devotion he was showing to Rhea, but only to fall back into the same ways at the first opportunity which presented itself. He was also sincerely inclined to think that, in consequence of the peculiarity of American manners, his attentions would seem unimportant; and besides, when Rhea gave him her little hand or hung upon his arm, his feelings were deeply touched by the youth and beauty of the girl, and his good resolutions were thrown to the winds.

The young Archibald had at first thought with the greatest indifference of the stranger's residence at his uncle's house; and when M. Deblain went out constantly with his cousins,

he had only blamed the intimacy on the ground that it would get them talked about ; but when he saw the attentions of Raymond Deblain to Rhea, he became jealous, and looked with an evil eye on him whom he considered a dangerous rival ; so one morning, in the garden, he stopped Rhea, and said to her :

" Beware of that Frenchman—all his countrymen are immoral : he will ruin your reputation, will swear to love you, and will one day disappear, after having seriously compromised you."

" Are you mad, Archibald ?" replied the girl, laughing. " M. Deblain has not an idea of paying his addresses to me."

" Then why are you and your sister so eager to go for rides and excursions with him ?"

" Just because it amuses us ; because M. Deblain is lively, witty, and polite ; because he does not keep making disagreeable remarks about our dress, our pleasures, our ways, as you do."

" But I love you, cousin, and have but one wish—that of making you my wife."

" I'm much obliged to you ; but I have told you a hundred times I have no taste for the kind of life you offer me."

" You are risking your eternal welfare !"

" Indeed ! Well, I don't believe that ; but if



I did, I should prefer the risk to your way of saving me from it."

"Then you never mean to be my wife?"

"Never!"

"Then suppose this wicked Frenchman should wish to marry you?"

"He! He is very nice, but he is twice my age! Besides, I don't believe he has the least idea of marrying. In a fortnight's time he will be gone, and will think no more of me than I of him."

"Then you don't care for him, and he has never told you he loves you?"

"Oh, my good cousin, that has nothing to do with you!" And, after making him a low curtsy, Rhea ran off. Archibald sighed, raised his eyes to heaven, and joined his father, who had just come into the garden, and whose appearance had probably hastened the departure of the young lady.

"Well," asked the reverend gentleman, "what explanation has your cousin given you?"

"Not one in which I can put any faith," said the young man sadly. "She declares that this accursed foreigner is not courting her, and that she does not care for him."

"Then why does she let him compromise her? For the honour of the family, this must

be stopped;" then he added, "and for the sake of our fortunes also."

He took his son's arm, and began speaking to him in a low tone, as if he did not wish one of his words to be overheard; and he worked up Archibald to such a fit of enthusiasm that, a quarter of an hour later, the latter, quite transformed, held out his hand to Rhea, and said:

"Have all the fun you can now, my pretty cousin; when your guest has gone back to France, we will resume our recent conversation. I hope it may be very soon."

Miss Panton walked away, making him no answer beyond a slight shrug of her shoulders.

## CHAPTER III

IN WHICH THE REV. J. THOMPSON SAVES THE  
HONOUR OF THE PANTONS

MISS RHEA had spoken truly, for M. Deblain was indeed thinking of returning to Europe, and he had already mentioned his departure to Mr. Panton, when, the day after Archibald's last exhortation to his cousin, about nine o'clock in the morning, a servant came to tell Raymond that Miss Panton was expecting him to take his usual daily ride with her.

Our friend, being quite ready, went down immediately, but was surprised to see only Rhea in the courtyard of the house, and that she had already mounted her horse.

"Where is Miss Jenny?" he asked.

"My sister has such a bad headache she cannot come with us to-day. Shall you be afraid to go out alone with me?"

He answered this question by pressing his

lips to the hand the young girl held out to him, and, as he mounted, he said :

"Where are we going ?"

"To Camden Place. Will that suit you !"

"Perfectly well, but it is such a distance ; we shall never be back in time for lunch."

"Then we will have lunch out there."

Rhea rode out first, and M. Deblain followed her.

After having passed the first square, they went up Twentieth Street, through Pennsylvania Avenue to Fairmount Park, then through the woods to Camden Place, a pretty country-place about fifteen miles from Philadelphia.

So long as they were in the city, where, notwithstanding the early hour, the roads were crowded, the riders, being forced to go slowly and to keep clear of the vehicles, had not exchanged many words, but once under the beautiful avenue of great trees which leads to the Wissahickon, they drew nearer to each other, and Raymond said to Rhea :

"You cannot imagine how glad I am that you determined to ride this morning, notwithstanding your sister's indisposition. When we all three take these excursions together on horseback, it is delightful, but for us two alone—just like two——"

As he stopped abruptly the coquettish young American said smilingly :

"Just like two——"

"Well, two lovers—since you make me complete my sentence."

"Do you love me, then, M. Deblain ; and do you suppose that I love you ?"

It would be difficult to make any one understand the tone, at once childish and coquettish, in which these words were said.

Raymond was for a moment embarrassed by them, but, instantly recovering his self-possession, he replied :

"To the first of your questions, Miss Rhea, I have the right to answer, yes—because I have never met a more charming woman than you ; but I am not foolish enough to suppose you care for me : I content myself with the hope that I am not indifferent to you. It is for you to enlighten me on the subject."

"Do French girls ever make such admissions ?"

"I don't know at all, because I never asked any of them."

"Oh, come now, did you never, *never* ? And there is my cousin Archibald, with such a dreadfully bad opinion of you !"

"What, has *he* been saying bad things about me?"

"Yes, if it be bad to say that *you* are, like all Frenchmen, a dangerous associate for a girl."

"Oh, that is just the notion of a jealous man, and, unfortunately, there is not the least reason for saying it of me. Has not that *very good* young Mr. Archibald been more or less engaged to you?"

"Never! never in my life! Not that he has never asked me to share the existence of a future light of the Church, as his father calls him. Even so late as yesterday he tried to allure me by assuring me I was running into danger of eternal perdition. Alas! I have not the slightest desire to be a parson's wife, even though he should attain to the highest dignities."

"Well, really I cannot fancy you in that kind of company—you, so pretty, so gay—and such a daring rider."

M. Deblain ended his phrase in these words, because just as he was speaking Miss Rhea, with a sharp cut of her whip, had chastised her horse for a slight stumble. They had got beyond the Wissahickon, to the edge of the wood; the road stretched before them, deserted and shady.

"Now for a gallop, and let him follow who loves me!" exclaimed the girl, starting her horse into a gallop.

Raymond imitated his companion, and for half an hour they went a wild chase under the thick foliage of the ancient trees of that beautiful forest, which extends to the south of Philadelphia.

Sometimes our friend remained a few paces behind, so as to admire at his leisure the figure of the girl, whose habit displayed to perfection her waist and splendid shoulders; who, firmly placed on her saddle, her hair blown about by the breeze, lovely in her beauty and courage, urged on her horse with whip and voice.

Then he overtook her, gained upon her a little, and found her still more fascinating; her bosom heaving with her quickened breath, her complexion brilliant with youth, her lips wreathed with smiles, and the expression of her eyes full of frankness and daring.

At last she stopped almost suddenly, and, as her foaming steed shook himself, pricked up his ears, and whisked his mane, she turned towards her companion, and said to him with a hectoring air:

"Well, what say you? If he were my husband, and not even greater than a bishop,

do you think my grave cousin would let me do as I am doing now? Ah! how delightful is the open air, with free exercise and liberty!"

"I say you are perfectly charming, that I have never seen a more intrepid horsewoman, nor a lovelier creature than you. But I suppose you mean to give the worthy Mr. Archibald reason for thinking his suspicions well-founded."

"How so?"

"Well, by so acting that he has some right to be jealous of me—of the man who loves you."

"M. Deblain!"

"Oh, I beg your pardon; I know well that a declaration of love, when one is on horseback, is out of place. Such things should be whispered, hand clasping hand, the lover kneeling at his lady's feet."

"Oh, not in America," said Rhea, laughing: "however, I see my cousin was quite right; Frenchmen are dangerous creatures; so, if you please, we will talk of something else."

Feeling more deeply touched than she wished to appear, the coquettish heiress of the rich American pushed her horse into a trot.

A quarter of an hour later, the two riders, whose conversation had been turned to indif-



ferent matters, stopped at Camden Place, in the courtyard of the Star Tavern.

Deblain, who had dismounted first, then helped Rhea, and he held her in his arms a moment or two longer than was quite necessary.

It would be impossible to say how, at once chaste and frank, was the manner of the girl in this momentary embrace—her face turned aside, but with smiling lips, her figure bent slightly backward, she let herself be lifted down by this man who was eagerly regarding her, and the beating of whose heart she could almost hear. But hardly had her feet touched the ground, when she stamped a little and beat her riding-habit with her whip, holding it up in her left hand. She was completely mistress of herself, and exclaimed :

"Now for lunch! I am famished."

"Why, of course," said Raymond, in the same gay tones, "we will have lunch here together."

"Yes, unless you would like to invite Mr. Booth."

Booth was the landlord of the Star, who, having recognized the daughter of the great manufacturer, Elias Panton, one of his best customers, came forward to take her orders,

without showing any surprise at seeing her with a stranger.

"What can you give us?" asked Rhea. "I want you to surpass yourself, so that this gentleman, M. Deblain, a friend of my father's, may have pleasant recollections of the cooking at the best hotel at Camden Place."

"Leave it to me, Miss," said Mr. Booth. "Will you have your lunch in the saloon, or in the garden?"

"Oh, in the garden: yonder, in that arbour, we shall be very comfortable."

She pointed to a mass of honeysuckle in bloom.

"In ten minutes you shall be served," said the hotel-keeper; and he went into the house to give his orders.

Miss Panton came back to M. Deblain, who, although he had ceased to be surprised at anything, was not the less charmed; and she said to him:

"When I think that at this very moment they may be at lunch at home, and that my uncle Jonathan and his son Archibald may be saying all sorts of bad things about you to my father, and telling him that I am compromising myself by going out alone with a stranger—a Frenchman—I begin to think perhaps they

are right ; perhaps I ought not to have come out riding to-day without my sister. What a state that good Miss Gowntall must be in ! '

Rhea said all this in the midst of bursts of laughter, walking on with M. Deblain, and cutting with her whip at the rose-trees and acacias.

They had just made the tour of the garden when a waiter came to tell them their lunch was served.

They went into the arbour where their table was set, and sat down opposite each other—Rhea all smiles, and delighted at her escapade ; Raymond slightly embarrassed at finding himself alone with the beautiful girl, whom he was beginning really to love.

Mr. Booth had kept his word. The table was elegantly decked with flowers ; and the first course, some delicious little river-trout, promised well for the rest of the lunch. As for the wine, champagne of one of the best brands of Rheims was cooling in an ice-pail.

Miss Panton had taken off her hat, and with a slight movement of her hand, pushed back her hair. She was really lovely, with her fearless grace and youthful ingenuousness.

" You are not eating," said she to her companion, who never took his eyes off her. " I

am sure Miss Gowentall would think me most unpoetical because I am so hungry—not that she lives on air by any means. Don't you like this fish? It is excellent, and you should follow my example."

"You are right," said Raymond; "but really you are so pretty——"

"That it quite takes away your appetite? I suppose you want to get thin and sallow, like my cousin Archibald. Well, I don't; and I advise you not to. Give me some champagne, if you please."

The young girl held out her glass, thus displaying the rounded form of her bust.

Deblain rose, and, taking care to fill Rhea's glass slowly, he kissed the hand which was nearest to him, saying:

"Rhea, I love you—I do really love you!"

"Then," said a solemn voice, "this is the wedding-breakfast!"

Amazed, they lifted their eyes to the entrance of the arbour, at which stood Mr. Thompson and his son.

It was the reverend gentleman who had said these words, addressing at once his niece, M. Deblain, and a third person who was standing behind the two clergymen.

"Why, it is my uncle and cousin!" cried

Rhea merrily, to whom the phrase she had just heard was but a joke, and one in very bad taste. "By what fortunate chance have we the pleasure of seeing you?"

"It is not by any *chance* that we are here; it is by the will of the Almighty."

"And for the honour of the family," added Archibald, also very solemnly.

"The will of the Almighty and the honour of the family!" said Raymond, rising. "What is the meaning of this nonsense? In what way is Miss Panton's good name compromised by her coming to Camden Place and having lunch with me, in the open air, in a public garden?"

Looking very red, the girl also had risen. Her face showed violent emotion and indignant pride.

"It is possible," resumed Jonathan, in a monotonous way, as if he were preaching a sermon, "that such things are unimportant in your country, but it is not so here in the States. A man who has been constantly in the company of a young girl for a month, who takes her away from her father's house, and says to her, 'I love you,' that man declares himself affianced. He takes upon him an engagement, and must unite himself with her by the sacred ties of marriage. Before Mr. Macdonald, the Sheriff of the

district"—the clergyman pointed to the man who accompanied him—"it is my right and my duty, M. Deblain, to ask you if you intend repairing by marriage the moral wrong you have done my niece?"

"Why, uncle, you must be mad!" cried Rhea indignantly.

"You are disrespectful to a minister of the Lord," said Jonathan. "It is this gentleman I am addressing, and it is for him to answer me."

"Yes; it is he who must answer us," repeated the lanky Archibald, in sad accents, and with supplicating looks at his cousin.

"Gentlemen," said Raymond, who had recovered a little from his first amazement, "I do not understand you——"

Rhea stopped him suddenly by saying:

"I answer for him. No; M. Deblain has never made me any promises. It is I who brought him here; I who made him come with me—a thing he has done, however, nearly every day."

"Until to-day you have always been accompanied by your sister or Miss Gowentall," said her uncle; "to-day you are alone with this gentleman, in a lonely spot, and we came up just at the moment when he was kissing your

hand and declaring his love to you. Is this true?"

"It is true," said Raymond, anxious to put an end to this ridiculous scene, by which Miss Panton seemed much humiliated. "Yes; I have told the young lady that I love her, and it is perfectly true that, if she likes, I will become her husband. But what has it to do with you?"

The two clergymen raised their hands and eyes to Heaven, in witness of the blasphemy of the stranger.

"Did Mr. Panton send you?" continued Raymond. "If he did, in an hour's time I will ask him for his daughter's hand; if he did not send you, go about your own business and leave us alone."

"Sir," said the Sheriff, "you do not seem to understand our laws. A gentleman seen alone with a young lady, on as intimate terms as you and Miss Rhea appear to be, has contracted with her an engagement."

"Unless the young girl herself refuse to accept him," said Rhea proudly.

"Oh, do refuse!" murmured Archibald, in his cousin's ear. "I have never doubted your honour; I love you; you will be my wife; and then no one will ever think of blaming you."

"Ah, now I understand your little plan," said Miss Panton aloud, and drawing nearer to Raymond as if to ask his protection. "You thought that, as I should certainly refuse to be your accomplice in dragging M. Deblain into matrimony, I should only be too glad to get out of the scrape by becoming your wife. You have made a mistake, cousin. I won't have you because I don't like you; and M. Deblain shall not marry me because——"

"If I have not the happiness to become your husband," interrupted M. Deblain, taking Rhea's hand, "it will be because you will not have me. Accept my name, and I shall bless even the singular intervention of these gentlemen."

Without drawing her hand away from Raymond's, but also without uttering a word, Rhea hung down her head.

"Then," said Jonathan to M. Deblain, "you are willing to marry Miss Panton?"

"Certainly, if she will have me for her husband."

"And you, Rhea?"

The lovely girl raised her eyes to her companion's, and, seeing that he was regarding her with smiling and affectionate looks, she answered:



"I will do just what M. Raymond wishes."

The sallow, pale Archibald became still more yellow; the Sheriff put on a grin of satisfaction; and as to the Rev. Jonathan, he drew from the depths of one of his pockets a Bible, and said sanctimoniously:

"Then all is well in the sight of the Lord!" And opening his book and addressing M. Deblain, he began reading: "Wilt thou have this woman to be thy wedded wife, to live together after God's ordinance in the holy estate of matrimony? Wilt thou——"

"Excuse me, Mr. Thompson," interrupted Deblain, "but why are you saying this to me, when I have told you that, immediately after my return to Philadelphia, I will ask your brother-in-law for his daughter's hand?"

"There is no need of that; I am marrying you."

"You are marrying us, without any sort of formality, in the midst of lunch, out in the open air!"

"The time and place for celebrating the marriage of two of His creatures are unimportant in the eyes of the Almighty. I beg of you not to interrupt me."

M. Deblain shrugged his shoulders, and looked smilingly at Rhea, as if he would say, "Well,

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Standing with both her hands resting on the back of a chair, Rhea gave him a glance of acquiescence.

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The reverend gentleman continued: "Wilt thou love her, comfort her, honour and keep her in sickness and health: and, forsaking all other, keep thee only unto her, so long as ye both shall live?" Then, turning to Rhea, he said nearly the same words, and went through the Marriage Service till he came to that part of it concerning the ring, when, taking one out of his waistcoat-pocket, he placed it on the fourth finger of his niece, saying to M. Deblain, who muttered to himself at sight of the ring: "Zounds! the reverend gentleman has forgotten nothing!"

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"Repeat these last words: 'With this ring I thee wed, with my body I thee worship, and with all my worldly goods I thee endow! In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.'"

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The friend of Dr. Plemen obeyed, Rhea trembling a little; then the clergyman closed his book, and, raising his hat, said:

nd looked  
y, "Well,

"My dear nephew and niece, you can now resume your lunch." And signing to his son

and the Sheriff to follow him, the good pastor retired.

The ceremony had lasted ten minutes.

"Then are we really married?" asked Raymond, as soon as he found himself alone with Rhea.

"For your sake, I am *afraid* we are," answered Rhea, with a smile.

"*Afraid*, for my sake! For mine alone? And how about you?"

"Oh, as for me, I am only afraid of one thing, and that is, that you should think I was in league with my uncle and cousin to play you this trick?"

"Play me a trick! Oh, Rhea, that expression deserves a severe punishment;" and he drew her gently to him and kissed her tenderly.

"Oh, Monsieur Deblain!" said the girl, struggling a little.

"Madame Deblain," answered Raymond gaily, "you have soon forgotten the words you have just pronounced: 'I will love, honour, and obey.' Loving me will come in time, perhaps; meanwhile, you must obey me."

"Then you are not angry with me?"

"For being my wife?"

"For being your wife—rather in spite of you?"

"The fact is that, on leaving Walnut Street this morning with you, I never suspected I should return from my ride, married—irrevocably married. However, if the matter has not caused you too much pain and annoyance——"

The charming girl placed her hand on her husband's shoulder, and said, "You must not think I am pained or annoyed."

"Then, hurrah for the Reverend Jonathan and his son, not forgetting the Sheriff!" He again kissed the girl, who no longer refused his caress.

"Now," said he, "as we both owe obedience to your worthy uncle, let us sit down at table again—not ceremoniously opposite each other, but side by side, and eat our wedding-breakfast."

He placed his chair by that of Rhea, and gave her a partridge wing, adding:

"How surprised your father will be! I only hope he may not be very angry!"

"He would only be angry if he thought I had been entrapped against my will," said Rhea coquettishly.

"Then you do not quite detest me?"

"No, not quite. I had determined, in my own mind, to marry a Frenchman; so much the worse for you that you happened to be the only one in my way."

The very slight amount of coolness that had ever existed between them was gone, and, five minutes afterwards, the new-married pair were perfectly in accord with each other; and, when they mounted their horses to return to the city, would have scandalized the Rev. Jonathan by their light-heartedness, if he could have seen and heard them.

The truth is, Rhea was delighted to have become a Frenchwoman. She was going to live in Paris—live just as she liked—so, at least, she thought. She would have her dresses from the very best dressmakers in Paris; she would no longer have to listen to the moralizings of Miss Gowentall, the sermons of her uncle, nor the sighs of her cousin Archibald.

As to M. Deblain, if he admitted to himself that he would never have had the courage to get married, because he was so accustomed to his old-bachelor life, and because he would never have dared to face the jokes of his friend Plemen, yet he was delighted that matrimony had been forced upon him, since it was with so charming a woman that he felt he should love her with his whole heart.

Thus Rhea and Raymond rode on as happily as possible, and it was not till they got to Walnut Street and had dismounted that they looked at

s that had each other, wondering how they should tell  
e, and, five Mr. Panton about it—then they both burst out  
pair were laughing.

and, when "Well, it is your business," said the young  
to the city girl; "I must go and change my dress. You  
nathan by know, at this hour, father is always in his office;"  
have seen and, kissing her hand to M. Deblain, she ran  
away to her room.

d to have "Well," said M. Deblain to himself, "the  
s going to story is not too easy to tell. What a queer  
so, at least, country! Rhea is a charming girl, and so is  
resses from her sister; but as for the rest of the family,  
she would what oddities they are! Luckily, uncle Jonathan  
ralizings of—for I am his nephew now!—and cousin Archi-  
uncle, nor bald will not go with us to France."

to himself While thus thinking, Rhea's husband passed  
courage to through the hall and entered the private office  
ustomed to of Mr. Panton, who was busy with his corre-  
spondence.

ould never "Ah, here you are," said his host, looking up;  
nd Plemen, "you have come just in time, for I was writing  
r had been to Roubaix about that cloth of which I wanted  
o charming you to give me your opinion."

e her with "Excuse me, my dear Mr. Panton," said  
as happily Raymond, "but I have a much more delicate  
to Walnut matter about which I must speak to you—a  
looked at matter which concerns you much more nearly."

"Indeed: pray what is it?"

"You know I went out for a ride this mornin' with your daughter Rhea; well, out there, at Camden Place——"

"You married her."

"What! do you know it?"

"Of course I do; my brother Jonathan came and told me himself. While you were finishing your lunch, he came back by rail, and told me the story."

"And you think it nothing extraordinary."

"Not the least. You were courting my daughter; she liked you, she has married you and you are a good fellow, whom I like very much. It was your business, not mine. I know you cannot have had a very jolly wedding, being married by my lanky brother-in-law; but I hope he won't bring you any ill-luck. You may thank your stars he did not preach you a long sermon, but though you have been let off this time, he will catch you yet! Well, shake hands, my son, and, by-the-by, you owe me twenty dollars for the ring Thompson put on Rhea's finger. He brought me the bill for it; I shall deduct it from Rhea's fortune."

Perfectly amazed, but much delighted, Rhea's husband cordially shook hands with Mr. Panton and hastened away to his wife.

The next day this strange marriage was

legally performed at the French Legation, and a fortnight later Monsieur and Madame Deblain sailed for France.

Although Raymond was delighted with his good fortune, he had not dared to announce his marriage to Dr. Plemen; he meant to do it by a telegraphic despatch from Havre.

Naturally the good Mrs. Panton had wept much on separating from her daughter, and the worthy Jonathan had avenged himself for the marriage he himself had brought about by addressing a long sermon to the happy pair, and by stuffing Raymond's luggage with religious tracts.

As to Jenny, who was left alone to the tender mercies of Miss Gowentall, she whispered, as she tenderly embraced her sister :

"How lucky you are to get away to France—to see Paris! Ah well, I will soon join you there, even though I should be obliged to marry Colonel Parker."

This is how, three months after leaving Vermel, the friend of Dr. Plemen, the hardened old bachelor, returned to it married, and very much in love with her to whom he had given his name, in the midst of a lunch, in the gardens of the Star, at Camden Place, in the State of Pennsylvania.



## CHAPTER IV

## PROVINCIAL STRUGGLES

AT the time of which we are writing Vermeil had been long connected with Paris by a railway, yet it had not lost the provincial air which does disappear from the most remote towns as railway communication brings them into closer connection with the metropolis. By means of rapidity and facility of communication, the smallest towns become Parisianized ; and if, here and there, in some ancient cities the picturesque has not entirely disappeared—if all parts of them, reminding us by their ancient buildings of bygone days, have not yet been replaced by “ Terminus Boulevards ” or “ Station Avenues ”—yet manners and customs at least have been transformed.

Life in the provinces has ceased to have the calmness and regularity of former times ; it has grown more expensive, and, consequently, more anxious, feverish, troubled. The love of luxury and the desire for show have crept into the

humblest households ; and whereas formerly people were rich with ten thousand francs a year, now, with the same income, they are in straitened circumstances.

Parisian importations have killed off the small local industries. The gentlemen have their clothes from Parisian tailors, who come twice a year to take the orders of their country customers ; and the lawyer's wife of the smallest country town would blush if she could not, now and then, order a gown from a fashionable Parisian dressmaker.

Paris absorbs everything ; men of real talent, the *plucked* ones, the ambitious ones, and the pretty girls. It is true that, by way of compensation, Paris sends into the provinces its lawyers who can get no business to do, and whom the provinces return as their members, although they know nothing concerning the interests of their constituents ; just as Paris gets itself represented in Parliament by the schoolmasters, chemists, and brewers of the provinces, whose country neighbours would not listen to them for a moment.

If, when railways were first thought of, M. Thiers declared himself their enemy, it was perhaps more because he foresaw all the changes they would occasion than because

he doubted the practical utility of the invention.

From the present state of things, and from the application of universal suffrage, there has resulted a fusion of all classes of society in the towns, where the lines of demarcation were once most strictly observed. Where once nobility, law, manufactures, trade, formed separate castes, all are now united; the struggle against the difficulties of life on the one side, ambition on the other, has produced this social phenomenon.

Politics at once divide people and group them; self-love and personal dignity disappear in toadying to voters. The rich landowner pays court to his farmers, who are members of the municipal council; the great manufacturer bargains with his foremen, who cajole the workmen for their votes; the proudest ladies flatter their servants, whose husbands or lovers are influential men, orators at public meetings.

The smallest county town has its racecourse, with its bookmakers, its thimble-riggers, its pickpockets, as well as two or three clubs, at which baccarat brings its victims to grief even more speedily than it does in Paris.

One of the consequences of this decentrali-

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zation, in the worst sense of the word, is that family life has almost disappeared everywhere. If some one of a statistical turn were to give his mind to this curious calculation, he would certainly find, in the Marais, or any other commercial district of Paris, more respectable women than in many county towns of a hundred thousand inhabitants.

But if the provinces have become thus modified, they have none the less preserved two of their own special vices—envy and slander. They have acquired from Paris a goodly number of faults, but very few desirable qualities.

Littleness of mind has remained intact, while true generosity is almost unknown; the people are full of distrust, and new-comers, whose business may take them there, are the objects of a thousand secret jealousies and animosities. "Where do they come from? what has their past life been? who are their relations?" And when they have not complete and indisputable information on all these points, the most improbable fables are invented about the unfortunate strangers.

In Paris, on the contrary, it is for strangers, provided they know how to manage, that the heartiest welcome, the most unlimited credit,

the most brilliant success is reserved. Often this is carried to a most unjust and ridiculous extent, and costs the Parisians rather dear. In the provinces every new-comer is suspected, watched, and isolated.

This picture is a tolerably just one of the state of society at Vermel in 188—.

There was but a small and restricted group which was composed of a few families of the old nobility, and of those of the presidents and councillors of the Court of Appeal, who did not belong to that new race of judges whom the Republic has so hastily drawn from obscurity, in consequence of the need it feels for having, in every position, men devoted to its institutions.

These latter functionaries, who were destined soon to become more numerous—thanks to that iniquitous measure, which, paradoxically, has been called the purification of the magistracy—had no access to these exclusive circles, in which were cherished conservative and religious opinions: they and their colleagues consorted with their political and religious sympathizers in the other groups of the society of Vermel.

We thus see that the magistracy of the chief town of the Seine et Loire was divided into

d. Often two distinct castes, and it is easy to understand that this division, and the antagonism which resulted from it, were very detrimental to those who became amenable to the law—unless politics happened to be completely foreign to the cause in question.

M. Deblain, who belonged to the rich manufacturing class, was a favourite with everybody, notwithstanding his great popularity as a ladies' man, because he was known to be a very honourable man, and most open-handed to any one who was in trouble; but he had not much to do with the higher society of the town, although, from the known opinions of his family, he might have been supposed a Conservative.

To these dignified circles he much preferred his own lively and gay world, peopled by the wives and daughters of the rich *industriels* of Vermel, who were quite Parisian in their tastes and manners, and of which he was a distinguished member.

His family did not trouble him much, for he had but one near relation: an aunt, his mother's sister, Madame Dusortois, who was poor, and a widow with two daughters.

This Madame Dusortois, who was a very devout person, an excellent mother, but very

greedy of money, had always hoped that Raymond would marry her elder daughter Bertha, a pretty girl, who liked her cousin more because her mother wished it than from any inclination of her own, and in order to have a son-in-law who would share her religious opinions. Madame Dusortois was always vainly trying to bring her nephew back to the paths of virtue and the bosom of the Church.

Not that M. Deblain gave himself out as an atheist, or even a freethinker; his education, and his respect for his mother's memory, made it impossible for him ever to speak lightly of sacred things. But he was indifferent, and seldom appeared at church, and this frequently brought upon him the animadversions of the strictly religious Madame Dusortois.

"You do very wrong," she would say to him whenever she had an opportunity to speak. "you are never seen at church, and I daresay you never say your prayers."

Then her nephew—out of patience, and perhaps feeling that his aunt was not entirely wrong—said to her one day, with rather doubtful gravity:

"It is too true, my dear aunt, too true, that I am an unbeliever. But it is not my fault; one cannot alter one's disposition. However, if you

like, we can arrange the matter satisfactorily—you shall go to church and pray for me, and I will give alms for you and myself. By that means God in His goodness, and the poor in their misery, will each be satisfied."

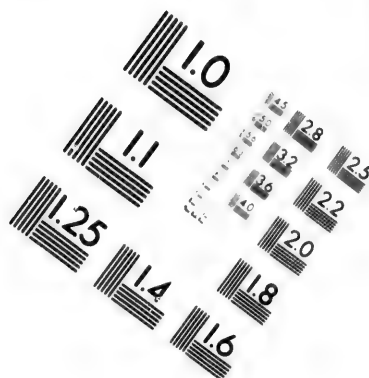
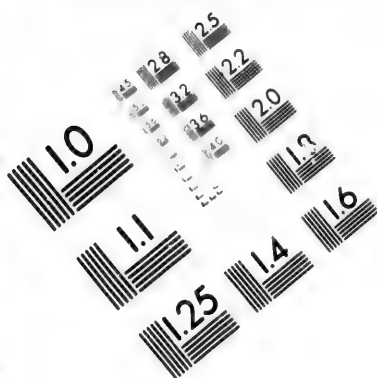
This reply, which hit rather hard, had been talked over in the town, and had caused a coolness between the aunt and nephew; and the good lady had never returned to the charge, though fully intending in her own mind to resume her plans of conversion when Raymond should be her son-in-law; for she never ceased to entertain this hope, and never admitted the possibility of her nephew thinking of marrying any one but her daughter Bertha. And if, by any ill-luck, he should remain a bachelor, well, her children would inherit his wealth: thus she had determined it must be.

As to Dr. Plemen, he went everywhere, and everywhere was well received.

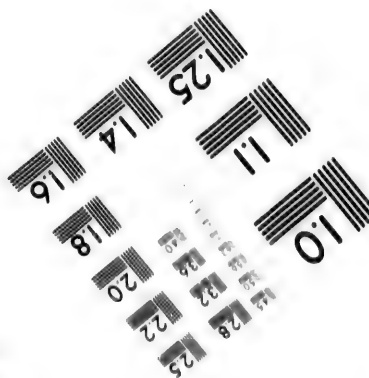
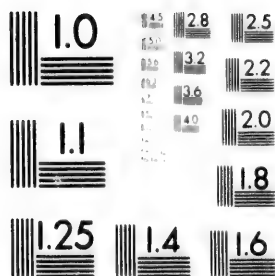
If some people thought him too fashionable-looking for a doctor, if some thought him too fond of worldly pleasures, all recognized his undoubted skill, his devotedness to his patients, and his perfect tact.

Being always grave and respectful to the dowagers, erudite with the learned men, gallant with the coquettish and fashionable ladies of





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the great manufacturing families, pleasantly familiar with the tradespeople, and generous with the working-class, he had acquired the reputation of being a charming man ; and, in fact, he was so.

Under circumstances most perilous to his political ambition, he had given a proof of his ready-wittedness, and, at the same time, acquired new friends. This had been on the occasion of the plan for secularizing the hospital of which he was the head doctor.

The honourable members of the municipal council of Vermel, jealous of the laurels of their colleagues of Paris, had decided that the Sisters should be superseded by paid nurses, and that the priests should never offer the consolations of religion to any patients, unless the latter expressly desired such ministrations.

At a public meeting, Dr. Plemen, being consulted on this subject, thus replied :

" It is not for me to examine this question from a religious or philosophical point of view ; my private opinions have nothing to do with the matter. My respect for liberty is well known, and I consider liberty of conscience as the most precious of all. I therefore shall give my opinion merely as a doctor ; and, as a doctor, I do not hesitate to say I greatly prefer the

Sisters to paid nurses—not because I doubt the kindness that any good women would show to those confided to their care ; and poor women are accustomed to fatigue, and know much of human misery, from having had, alas ! practical experience of it. But these women, happily for them, have not renounced, as nuns have, all family joys ; they have fathers, mothers, husbands, children. How, then, can we suppose that they would forget all these natural affections on crossing the threshold of a hospital ? To suppose it, would be an insult to their tenderness of heart. What would happen at the time when an epidemic should be raging around them ? Would they not, naturally, be seized by a fear of carrying the malady to those they love ? Is it likely that the woman who is called home by her own child would dare to hang over the bed of another little creature dying of croup ? She *must* be either a bad mother or a bad nurse ! That is inevitable, because it is human. I have no need to pursue this argument farther. It must immediately strike those who judge things from the point of view of the general welfare. As to the priests, it is also by medical arguments that I shall oppose their systematic exclusion from hospitals. That you should oppose the indiscreet offers of their ministra-

tions to those who are terrified at the sight of them, I grant you ; for I myself, not only in the hospital, but at any sick-bed, would oppose my patient's condition being aggravated by inopportune visits from a priest. If I ordered that a patient should be kept perfectly quiet, *nothing* should be allowed to disturb him. If, on the contrary, a suffering and dying man had been brought up in strict faith, it is evident that the sight of a priest would cause him no terror ; but would comfort him, and give him hope and courage. Why, then, should you drive away the priest ?

“ We doctors are allowed to use chloroform, nitrous oxide, even hypnotism—in a word, any anæsthetics to soothe the pain, not only of those on whom we operate, but also of those whose end is inevitable, imminent ; why, then, deprive of the ministrations of the priest and the consolations of religion, those who will feel moral and physical comfort from them, as certain as if we administered to them the most powerful anæsthetics ? The nervous phenomenon of insensibility to pain may be brought about by mental excitement ; courage may be born of the hope of a future life ; the patience to endure sickness may have its source in beliefs you do not share ; calmness may be given by religious

consolations which you deny. Now, calmness, patience, courage, insensibility to pain, are the things a doctor tries hardest to obtain for his patients ; if he succeed, he often saves what seem the most desperate cases.

"Why, then, refuse to science such powerful auxiliaries when it is permitted, for the same purposes, to use any known chemical agents ? If atheism could comfort the patient by saying to him, 'There is no God : there is nothing after this life ; when the malady which is torturing you puts an end to your life, you will utterly cease to exist ;' I, a doctor, whose mission it is to cure, would leave the atheist at the bedside of my patients. How then can you wish me to drive away him who says : 'Your pains here will be counted to you in a better world ! God may do a miracle to save you ! Death is deliverance, and brings eternal joy ;' and who in saying this, be it true or false, gives the courage, calmness, patience, we desire ? These are the reasons why, as a doctor, I entreat the council not to deprive the hospital of the Sisters or the priests !"

It may easily be imagined what an effect Dr. Plemen's speech produced. Religious people concluded from it that the learned doctor was a believer, because, while using arguments which

were needed for the success of his cause, he had, none the less, defended the priests and the Sisters; and the freethinkers judged him according to *their* ideas; since he had demanded, solely on medical grounds, the maintenance in the hospital of those whom they wished to drive out.

As to the municipal councillors of Vermel, who perhaps were a little afraid of the measure they had proposed merely with a view to popular applause, they secretly thanked the man whose skill had enabled them to forego carrying out their proposition.

By this master-stroke Eric Plemen had adroitly prepared all parties to support him as a candidate for election.

Such was the chief town of Seine et Loire, with its faults and good qualities as a large provincial town, with its divisions into castes and groups, at the moment of the marriage of M. Deblain; for, on landing at Havre, he had telegraphed to his friend Plemen; then he had written to him that he should not stay in Paris more than a week, and would soon be at Vermel with his wife, a charming young American, who had been Miss Rhea Panton.

Raymond ended his letter thus:

"You see, my dear Eric, one has to come to

it, one must marry at last; you will come to it yourself, because a doctor who is married and a father inspires more confidence, and you will find, even more easily than I, because you are a learned, celebrated and handsome fellow, a pretty little wife to make you happy.

"I hope, therefore, that you won't chaff me too unmercifully. I shall have quite enough to undergo at the hands of my aunt Dusortois, especially when she learns that her new niece is a Protestant. Now, she will be in despair about my eternal welfare! As for you, when you know my wife, you will think of nothing but envying me my fate."

On reading these lines, Plemen was for a moment utterly amazed—we would not like to affirm that he did not utter the word "idiot," in thinking of his friend, but he soon recovered from his surprise. Such was not the case with the terrible aunt when she learnt that her nephew had escaped her, at once as son-in-law, and as a person whose fortune her daughters might inherit.

"I knew," she exclaimed, "that Raymond would turn out badly!"

Not to have married her daughter, was "turning out badly," in the opinion of this estimable lady.



In her anger she went about telling every one how M. Deblain was bringing from America an adventuress, a good-for-nothing woman, to whom he had given his name!

During this time Rhea, living in the handsome apartments of her husband in the Boulevard Haussmann, where the doctor and Raymond had often entertained such gay company, was making acquaintance with Paris, its theatres, its promenades, its restaurants, its fashionable milliners; and she wrote to her sister:

"Since my arrival in France, or rather in Paris, I have led a delightful life, every day there has been some new pleasure. I have everything I want, except you, my darling. My husband is double my age, but in disposition he is as young as I am. None but Frenchmen can be so favoured. Get married as soon as you can, to some nice fellow who will bring you here. I have been here a fortnight, and, if I were single, I would marry even my cousin Archibald for the sake of staying here."

This letter crossed, on the ocean, the letters from Rhea's family. In fact, a few days later, Rhea received from Jenny news of those she had left in Philadelphia.

"I could never tell you, dear sister," wrote the young girl, "how dismal the house has been

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nd kind; but now that you are no longer here,  
am quite given over to the tender mercies of  
Miss Gowentall and the Thompsons, father and  
on.

"Uncle Jonathan never spares me any of  
his sermons; cousin Archibald keeps very close  
to me, for if I am not as pretty, or as gay, or as  
witty as you, I have just as good a fortune.  
But I have no more desire than you had to  
become *his* wife.

"As to Miss Gowentall, she took it into her  
head to learn to ride, so that she might accom-  
pany me to Fairmount Park! Luckily, after  
half a dozen lessons, our portly governess grew  
frightened, and gave it up.

"After that papa got me a groom to escort  
me, and he looks very nice, with his cockade,  
his top-boots, and his tight-fitting coat, with a  
rose in his button-hole.

"This steady young man, John, keeps about  
twenty yards behind me, but is no hindrance to  
that dreadful Colonel Gould-Parker, who comes  
down on me like a thunder-clap with his ad-  
dresses. He still seems to be extremely in love  
with me, and takes advantage of my loneliness,  
now that you have left me. Ah, if he were a

mere captain in the service of France, how quickly would I marry him, so as to be with you! Your poor Jenny loves you more than ever."

"The darling!" said Rhea, crying a little, as she read and re-read this letter; "how I wish my father would bring her here; we would soon find her a husband!"

After that she went about ransacking the shops, so as to send her sister all kinds of Parisian novelties, in order to console her a little and induce her to be patient.

This busy life on the part of the newly married pair had lasted about a month, when M. Deblain told Rhea that he was called home by his business affairs; and one fine morning they went by rail to Vermel—Rhea feeling a little timid, for she did not know what kind of society she should find there; Raymond alarmed about the reception his friends would give him, especially Dr. Plemen, who, far from accepting his invitation to join him at the Boulevard Haussmann, had excused himself on account of his work, and had thus terminated the first of his letters:

"Since you now have an uncle a clergyman, he ought to have said to you what St. Paul said to the Corinthians: 'Art thou bound unto

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wife? seek not to be loosed! Art thou loosed  
rom a wife? seek not a wife! He that giveth  
his daughter in marriage, doeth well; but he  
hat giveth her not in marriage, doeth better.'  
Thus, you see, Rabelais and Molière were  
lagiarists of the Apostles!"

Now, Deblain could not forget these sarcastic  
nes; and, as he knew he could not measure his  
vits against those of the doctor, he counted on  
Rhea's sweet smiles to vanquish him.

## CHAPTER V

### HOW DR. PLEMEN IS VANQUISHED

ON leaving the carriage, the first person whom Raymond saw was Eric Plemen. He was walking up and down the platform, awaiting the arrival of the train.

After having warmly greeted him, Raymond introduced him to Rhea, who offered him her hand, saying very graciously: "I have known you, Monsieur, a long time. My husband has told me so much of your mutual affection that I felt sure you would meet us here to bid us welcome."

"Madame," replied Plemen, "Raymond need not have named you. He wrote to me that he had married the prettiest woman in America. That was sufficient; I should have recognized you immediately."

He had offered his arm to Madame Deblain, whom he conducted to her carriage, and, as he was leaving her, he gallantly kissed her hand. Her husband took his seat beside her.

"Are you not going home?" asked Deblain.

"Not just yet," replied Eric; "I must go to the hospital, but I shall soon be back."

"You will dine with us, I hope?"

"Oh, I don't know whether I ought to accept—the very day you arrive."

"Pray, do come, Monsieur," said Rhea, smiling.

"It is agreed; you may rely upon me."

Respectfully bowing to the young lady, as the carriage drove off, he murmured:

"If Raymond has done a foolish thing, he has good excuse, for she is very lovely—too beautiful, perhaps, considering how weak he is. She is evidently a little person who will turn all the heads in Vermeil!"

Just then Rhea was saying to her husband:

"Monsieur Plemen is a delightful man; he is the kind of doctor I like; and if all doctors resembled him, sick people would be less afraid of them."

It was plain that M. Deblain had been right in reckoning on his wife's smiles to conquer his formidable friend.

That very evening, at dinner, Rhea completed her conquest; and the next day Eric had quite pardoned his old friend for having married. A fortnight later Rhea had com-

pletely won over everybody, male and female, to whom her husband introduced her.

Every one agreed in thinking her equally witty and pretty. They expected that she would give quite a new impulse to the society of the town ; and, as she had the tact to call at once on the Protestant minister, and on the old ladies who were at the head of the Reformed Church, and to take her place among them, there was soon a perfect chorus of praises sung about the young American.

Besides, it was soon found out that Madame Deblain was the daughter of a rich manufacturer of Philadelphia, Elias Panton, who was well known in Vermel, with which town his house had long done important business, and then everybody complimented the handsome Raymond on his choice.

There were only his bachelor friends and a few coquettish ladies, who were deprived by his marriage of his attentions, who said he had married a person much too young for him, and who charitably predicted that he would rue it, sooner or later.

We need hardly say that Deblain had taken care to tell no one but his most intimate friend the extremely American form in which his marriage had taken place. Although the

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words of this union, so lightly pronounced by the Rev. Jonathan, in the garden of the Star Tavern, had been legalized according to French law, provincial prudery would never have acknowledged it as a true marriage, had its singular incidents been known. However, we must admit that the liking for Rhea was far from being unanimous. First, Madame Dusortois, to whose house M. Deblain had taken his wife, from mere motives of deference, and because he thought he ought to do so, received her very stiffly, and had returned Rhea's visit very unwillingly, and not accompanied by her daughters.

The avaricious old lady could not forgive her nephew for having so completely ruined all the hopes she had had of becoming his mother-in-law, and she felt logically justified in hating her who had taken the place of her elder daughter.

In her small world, and with her strict, or rather narrow, principles, Madame Dusortois easily found people to agree with her; and if they had at first reserved their opinions, they no longer dissimulated their envious feelings concerning the new-comer, when they found her sought after, flattered, and giving parties to which invitations were considered a distinction.



The wives of men of small property, of office-holders, and of certain magistrates who were obliged to live very economically, talked of Madame Deblain as a feather-brained coquette, who would ruin her husband and render him ridiculous, and said she was certain to come to a bad end.

According to these jealous spirits, it was scandalous for a foreigner thus to take the lead, and to brave public opinion, bringing her American manners to a hitherto quiet place, and setting a bad example to all young girls.

This was what was said, and what was repeated, by Raymond's aunt and some of her friends—among others, by Mesdames Lachaussée and Babou, the wives of the Attorney-General and of the Investigating Judge; and by others still, who, until the arrival of the daughter of the rich American, had held a certain rank, but who were now quite eclipsed.

It is true that the charming Madame Deblain had neglected nothing—had, on the contrary, done everything, though very innocently—to draw down on herself this enmity and petty jealousy.

Her husband, who loved her dearly, and whose weakness of character we know, having allowed her to arrange her household in

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her own fashion, his town-house, from having  
been merely comfortable, had become, in the  
tasteful hands of Rhea, the most elegant of  
dwellings.

The young lady's special apartments, con-  
iguous to those of her husband, on the first-  
floor, would have made the most coquettish  
Parisian envious. Everywhere there were the  
most expensive trifles, works of art, and  
ancient tapestries, which she brought from  
Paris at each of her visits. Her bath room  
was regarded as a wonder of luxurious arrange-  
ment.

At the first large dinner-party that Deblain  
gave to inaugurate his restored mansion, the  
table was strewn with flowers. Nobody had  
ever seen anything of the kind in Vermel.

The garden, which had been merely kept  
neat while Raymond was single, had been  
transformed. Communicating with the ground-  
floor, there was now a large conservatory, con-  
taining all sorts of wonderful tropical plants and  
the rarest flowers.

The coach-houses no longer contained, as  
they once did, only the brougham and the dog-  
cart of the master. There were also now a  
victoria and a phaeton, which Rhea herself  
drove; and the stable, which formerly had held

only the pair of carriage-horses and one saddle-horse, was now augmented by a pair of ponies and a splendid mare, which Madame Deblain rode almost every morning, either accompanied by her husband or by such of her lady friends as she had persuaded to join her in her rides; sometimes she rode alone, followed at the usual distance by a most correctly dressed groom. All this was considered quite scandalous by the good citizens, who, not having the means to do the same, asserted that such amusements were in dreadfully bad taste.

Then Rhea brought forward the fashion of playing croquet and lawn-tennis. Also they had paper-chases in the beautiful woods which surrounded the Malle, a country-house of her husband's at three leagues from Vermel. She had her five o'clock tea-parties, and many imitated her. She organized fancy fairs, theatrical representations, and tableaux-vivants; and *then* the society of the town divided into two very decided parties. In the one, they worshipped the beautiful American, the soul of all fêtes and pleasures; in the other, they hated her, and talked of her, plainly, as an abandoned woman, and of her husband as a fool.

However, Plemen defended her always and everywhere, affirming, what was true, that with

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all her eccentric ways, Madame Deblain was a thoroughly virtuous woman. At last, as he was so eager to break lances in Rhea's defence, the good creatures did not fear to insinuate that the handsome doctor had fallen in love with the coquettish stranger. And all this when she had been only about six or eight months married!

The truth is that Plemen, who until now had cared only for flirtations, *had* fallen under the charm of Rhea, whom he thought perfectly lovely; and, whilst living with the Deblains in the freest intimacy, he had, almost unknown to himself, glided down the declivity of such an all-absorbing love as makes a slave of even the strongest man; for nothing had been changed in the relations of the friends; and Deblain, just as when he was single, could do nothing without consulting Plemen.

The garden-gate which connected the two houses had remained unfastened; nothing was done by Rhea's husband without the advice of Plemen, which sometimes rather annoyed Rhea; Eric's place at the dinner-table was always ready for him, and Raymond would hesitate about going to Paris with his wife—a journey they frequently made—if his inseparable friend could not accompany them,

It was, in fact, in all honour, a household of three.

Deblain was not passionately in love with the woman who bore his name, but he was proud of her beauty, of her elegance, of the part that she played, and made him play, at Vermel; he loved to have compliments paid to him about her, especially by the doctor, who was rather embarrassed at having to play Gyges to this modern Candaule, for he was soon forced to admit to himself that his friend's wife was growing more and more dear to him.

He had even begun to think that Rhea had done a foolish thing in marrying a man of intelligence so inferior to her own—of such a commonplace type—so destitute of imagination; having no ambition beyond that of getting on in his business.

Why had not he accompanied Deblain to Philadelphia? Very certainly it was him whom the daughter of the rich Elias Panton would have chosen, and he would not have needed the intervention of the Reverend Jonathan to become her husband.

Was not this marriage, as it had been accomplished, perfectly absurd? Was it not amply proved that Miss Panton, in submitting to her

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uncle's will, had thought of nothing but getting away from her cousin Archibald, and coming to live in France?

When a friend, living with married people in close intimacy, gives way to such reflections, treacherous intentions are not far off. Pity for the woman is often the cowardly excuse that a man makes to himself when he designs to attack the honour of another.

In his strange and fatal aberration, Plemen soon came to saying to himself that, after all, he would be doing a humane action in consoling the adorable creature who was so ill-mated, and who must be unhappy.

Now, as to the latter point, the doctor was quite in the wrong. Madame Deblain neither was, nor thought herself, an object of pity. Certainly she was not much in love with her husband, but he was far from being disagreeable to her. Perhaps she might have liked him better if he had been younger, less common and prosaic, more ambitious; but if Raymond lacked these good qualities, at least he left his wife completely mistress of his house; whatever might be her expenditure, however extravagant might be some of her fêtes and excursions, he never made the slightest objection to anything.

When circumstances were about at this pass, Rhea received from her sister news for which preceding letters had not prepared her.

Jenny wrote: "I am married! Since yesterday I have been the wife of Colonel Gould-Parker, attaché to the United States Embassy at Paris! You know now the reason for this sudden marriage. Attaché to the Embassy in Paris! How could I resist that? Besides, it is only outwardly that my husband is rough and harsh. French manners will reform him, even if the great love he has for me does not suffice to do it. I wish you could have seen cousin Archibald's consternation when father told him that he had sanctioned my marriage with Mr. Gould-Parker! He wandered about the house, raising his hands and eyes heavenward! You would have thought, to see him hanging round mother, that he was in hopes she would find him a third Miss Panton—that is, a third fortune of a hundred thousand dollars! And then poor Miss Gowentall's despair! She could not get over it till father promised her an annuity, to indemnify her for the good care she had taken of us. Then, in the delirium of her gratitude, she threw herself into uncle Jonathan's arms, as he happened to be just in the way, and over he went! The reverend gentleman is a



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widower, and he is poor; can Miss Gowentall be thinking—

"Forgive me all this nonsense, dearest; but I am so happy at being married—no, I mean I am so happy in the thought of seeing you again soon: we sail in eight days, for the Colonel has orders to join the Embassy immediately.

"So I shall soon be with you; we shall be reunited, darling little sister; and, to complete my happiness, father has promised that he will soon come to France with mamma. I hope he won't think of bringing uncle Jonathan and cousin Archibald!

"Good-bye then, dear Rhea, for a little while. I feel sure that you will be in Paris to receive me when I arrive."

Madame Deblain's joy on reading this letter may be imagined. She did not care whom Jenny had married—Colonel Gould-Parker or any other—so that she came to France! She should see her, should prove to her how unaltered was her love, and that was all she cared about! Immediately after receiving the telegram informing her that Mrs. Gould-Parker had sailed on the *America*, she dragged Raymond away to Havre, where, eight days later, from the bridge of the steamer, Jenny



recognized Rhea at the end of the jetty. Less than half an hour later the sisters were in each other's arms, and the American colonel, stiff as a ramrod, serious as a soldier on duty, was vigorously shaking hands with M. Deblain, and saying to him, in tones which would have suited a De Profundis:

"My dear brother-in-law, I am very happy to see you."

"Confound it!" thought Raymond, as he withdrew his benumbed fingers from the large hand of the Yankee; "marriage has not made this good colonel any more sprightly!"

Indeed the colonel, whilst trying to be gracious, lost nothing of his stern aspect. When he smiled it was like the grin of a wild beast.

He was a tall, thin, muscular man, always severely buttoned up in military style, even when he was wearing a morning-coat; with an intelligent but harsh countenance.

He was supposed to be extremely fond of his profession, excessively ambitious, and still more jealous. He was one of those terrible husbands always ready to twist the necks of those who look with too much admiration at their wives, and to make a widower of himself at the mere suspicion of infidelity on the part

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During the voyage he had almost got himself into a dozen duels; however, so far, Jenny had not suffered much from the jealousy of her Pennsylvanian Othello—at least, she did not seem to pay much heed to it.

The next day the party set out for Paris, where the colonel and his wife occupied the apartments of Dr. Plemen in the Boulevard Haussmann until they could find rooms to suit them, and get them furnished; consequently, for a fortnight, the sisters were constantly running about with this end in view, and Mr. Gould-Parker could hardly get Jenny away from Madame Deblain long enough to make the official visits which they owed to the important members of the American colony in Paris.

Raymond, whose business called him to Vermel, had returned there alone. His wife was not to rejoin him until Mrs. Parker should be established in her new home in the Rue Dumont d'Urville, close to the United States Legation, and, from that time forward, Rhea's journeys became more and more frequent; for if the colonel had come to spend a few days at Vermel with Jenny, his jealousy, which Parisian life rendered more intense, would not have let

him authorize her quitting Paris unless he accompanied her.

Madame Deblain, like a veritable American, was always travelling to and fro. For the merest trifle she would jump into a train, alone or with her husband; would go to her sister's house morning, noon, or night, often without even sending a telegram to announce her arrival. The three hours' journey which separated her from Paris was a mere nothing.

It may be imagined what hold these continual absences from home gave to the enemies of Rhea—what scandal and gossip they gave rise to, especially on the part of Madame Dusortois, who, however, knew perfectly well that her niece went to Paris to be with her sister.

As to Jenny, it needed but a very few months for her to become a complete Parisian. She was talked of as one of the prettiest and most elegant of the American ladies. The "Society papers" mentioned her dresses, her courage as a horsewoman, and she soon had her drawing-rooms crowded with artists, literary men, and the celebrities of all kinds with whom rich Americans love to surround themselves.

This kind of life was rather a source of anxiety to the colonel, but his flattered pride silenced his conjugal fears. Besides, his wife's

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conduct was irreproachable, even to the most censorious.

There was a murmur of admiration whenever the sisters arrived together at the Comédie Française, at the Opéra, or in any of the drawing-rooms to which their fortune and beauty gave them access. This caused Rhea to regret that she did not live altogether in Paris—that she only appeared now and then like a meteor, instead of shining steadily as a star.

When she returned to Vermel she took Plemen into her confidence, and said to him, with one of those bright smiles which were her greatest charm :

"Doctors order their most robust patients to watering-places, when the ladies have a desire to go there. They ought also to discover a malady for which a residence in Paris is the necessary cure."

The gallant doctor hastened to reply, while keeping in his own hands, much longer than was necessary to feel her pulse, the hand of the young lady :

"Indeed, a country town is quite unworthy of you. If I had had the happiness to be your husband, I should have taken you away from here long ago—away from this hole, which, however, you have greatly improved. How

could you think of marrying Raymond? It is true that the marriage was the work of your uncle Jonathan. But Deblain, do what you will with him, will never be more than a commonplace man, incapable of understanding you."

Sometimes Rhea, in a light-hearted way, laughed at these speeches of the doctor; sometimes, on the contrary, she would blush, and withdraw her hand indignantly, saying, with a certain firmness:

"You forget, Dr. Plemen, that Raymond is your friend—and my husband!"

This was the answer of an honourable-minded woman, but the doctor would answer with the most perfect cynicism:

"Oh, no, I do not forget it; that is what so enrages me." Then he would add, in tones of mere pleasantry:

"Thanks to a very intelligent member of Parliament from the South, we have the divorce laws, just as you have in America! Now, if a pretty woman gets divorced in the provinces, it must be because she wishes to go and live in Paris—with the husband of her choice."

When Plemen expressed himself thus, Rhea was obliged to laugh; but as the great city and its pleasures haunted her mind more and more

incessantly, she more and more Parisianized the society of Vermel, with which she did just as she pleased, to the great scandal of Madame Dusortois, but to the delight of M. Deblain.

As to him, he thought his wife could do no wrong; and the day she returned from Paris, bringing plans for a theatre to be built at the Malle, at the end of the garden, and adjoining the conservatory, he expressed himself delighted with the project, which, as soon as it was known, elicited great applause from all the friends of the beautiful American.

They would be able to have plays in a real theatre, just as they did in Paris, at the houses of the Duchess of X. and the Marchioness of Z. ! Every one was delighted, and began discussing the parts each would perform in the coming plays.

As to Raymond, when Rhea introduced to him M. Felix Barthey, whose acquaintance she had made at her sister's house, and whom he had met in society in Paris, he said to the artist :

"Arrange it all with Madame Deblain; make yourself quite at home here and at the château. I approve beforehand all the arrangements you may make in concert with her, only try not to break up *all* the park, and don't be *too* extravagant."

Although Felix Barthey was not much past thirty, he was considered one of the first artists of the day, and his smallest pictures sold for high prices. Success had come to him more easily than to many of his brethren, because he had come to Paris as a man of fortune, which he inherited from his father, a rich merchant of Lyons, to whose business his elder brother, Armand, had succeeded. Felix, having a veritable vocation for art, had worked assiduously; and, from the commencement of his career, had been noticed by the public. He had also received the gold medal for the first picture he exhibited.

Besides this, during the war, he had volunteered, when he was under twenty, into a marching regiment, and had won a medal on the field of battle. Thus he had everybody's good word; and, being handsome, witty, and enterprising, his handsome house, in the Rue d'Offémont, was visited by all the Parisian celebrities.

It is easy to imagine that he and Madame Deblain soon understood each other; and, as they had full permission from Raymond, they hastened to arrange their plans. It was then the month of June, and the impatient Rhea, who was to spend part of the summer at Trou-



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villè with her sister, was determined that her theatre should be ready by the winter.

During her absence the rough work could be done ; on her return from the seaside, M. Barthey would come to the château to paint the curtain and the scenery.

It would have been impossible for Madame Deblain not to feel some affection and gratitude for so indulgent a husband. Therefore, all who sighed for her, Plemen included, wasted their sighs and their time. The scandal-mongers of Vermel were quite mistaken ; and Raymond was perfectly right to live, as he did, in the most perfect peace of mind. He was always happy and cheerful, and did not observe the changes which were taking place in the disposition and manners of his friend the doctor. Consequently, he was amazed when Plemen said to him one morning, after Madame Deblain had been about a fortnight at Trouville :

"Your wife is certainly irreproachable ; but you do wrong to leave her at the seaside alone with Madame Gould-Parker. Both the ladies are too young and pretty to live at such a place without giving rise to ill-natured remarks."

"Are you mad ?" answered Raymond.



"First, Rhea and Jenny are not alone." Is not the terrible colonel with them? When the colonel is there——"

"Yes; but the colonel will soon be gone, and if he takes his wife with him, yours will remain quite alone, at the mercy of all the idle men—who disappear invariably as the husbands' train arrives."

"The jealous men's train!" said Raymond, in that jesting tone which his marriage did not hinder him from using. "Don't be afraid; Parker will go to Japan without his wife. It is greatly against his inclination that he goes alone, but it is decided that his wife shall remain in Paris under our care."

Fearing to betray himself, Plemen answered nothing. It was his love for Rhea, much more than care for his friend's honour, which made him uneasy about her. He shrugged his shoulders, and turning away from Raymond he muttered:

"Colonels or not—they are all alike!"

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## CHAPTER VI

### THE BEAUTIFUL MRS. GOULD-PARKER

COLONEL GOULD-PARKER was indeed on the point of quitting France. His sojourn in Paris, as military attaché to the United States Legation, had been but a step towards a distant and more important mission. He had just been appointed by his Government to inspect the military establishments of Japan and of the north of China. He was also to study certain points around Behring's Strait.

Jenny's husband had at first thought of refusing this appointment, which would keep him absent from her a year; for he could not think of taking his wife with him. But ambition, love of his profession, patriotism, and perhaps fear of ridicule, had made him hide his jealous feelings; and he had decided, as Deblain had told Plemen, to leave his wife in Paris, having first made his brother and sister-in-law promise that they would never lose sight of her.

His departure was to be at the end of August, just when Madame Deblain was to return to Vermel, or rather to the Malle, there to remain till the end of the summer.

It had been arranged that Jenny should stay in the country with Rhea till the winter—for the jealous husband, these three months passed far from Parisian temptations was so much gained—and then the sisters would often be together, either in Vermel or in Paris.

The terrible Yankee never imagined that there would be as much gaiety (and perhaps more danger) at his sister-in-law's house as there could be anywhere. At Paris, whatever people may say or suppose, the virtue of women runs less risk than in the isolation of some small towns.

In Paris women are more on their guard; they know they have to do with those who will take advantage of every turn of fortune. Besides, if their friends are numerous, if they receive many people and go out a good deal, they will not have much time for love-making. The Parisian, having to attend church and fancy bazaars—having to make her appearance at the Bois, to see her dressmakers and milliners, &c.—could she possibly find time for all the phases of a romantic love affair?—to write letters, make

appointments, and, above all, keep them? Parisian women who fall in the midst of this busy existence are generally those whose virtue has always been of a doubtful kind.

In the provinces the reverse is the case. The obstinate pursuit by lovers—the books, the solitude, and vacancy of mind incident to married life—all war against conjugal happiness.

But neither Madame Deblain nor her sister seemed to have anything of this kind to fear, since they had, as it were, transported Paris to Vermel.

Be this as it may, the colonel departed, feeling only half comforted. And his wife soon had the proof of it by receiving from him—dated Suez, Point de Galle, and Singapore—long letters, in which he spoke to her, in almost threatening language, of the conduct a good wife should observe in the absence of her husband.

Rhea, to whom she read these letters, laughed heartily at them; and Jenny, who was not dreaming of any adventures, soon forgot the fierce letters of her husband, and gave herself up to the frivolous life led by her sister and her sister's friends.

The famous theatre was built, and Felix

Barthey was painting the scenery as fast as he could.

Whenever they were not in Paris, at Vermel, or out riding, the sisters spent all their time in the painting-room—two conservatories from which the plants had been cleared out: there Felix sketched, altered, and re-painted according to the fancies of the girls, in the midst of bursts of laughter, of the arrival of visitors; living in a delightful intimacy, in which the artist, in his white painting-dress, smudged here and there with colours, like a harlequin's dress, completely forgot his important work in Paris.

In the evening, in the great hall of the house—where they had arrived at the beginning of autumn—Felix Barthey gave out and explained the characters and the pieces that were to be played in the course of the winter, and M. Deblain was delighted at his wife's happiness; for the good man, whose business kept him all day at Vermel, never appeared at the Malle except on Sundays at dinner-time.

Plemen came very rarely to the country-house, notwithstanding the numerous and pressing invitations of Raymond. In order to excuse himself, he alleged that he was obliged to give up much time to a report on anæsthetics, which

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he intended sending to the Academy of Medicine, and by which he expected to advance himself with that learned body. The doctor was no less ambitious of becoming celebrated in his own profession than he was of being a politician; and when he did appear at his friend's house, it was generally to find fault with what was going on, however gracious Rhea and her sister might be to him. Then he would return home in worse humour than when he came.

Deblain, who felt the same friendship for Eric as he had ever felt, could not understand this change, which he could not help seeing; but he was far from supposing Eric to be in love with his wife; he thought he was vexed with him for having freed himself from his influence to bow to that of another; that he was dull from having to live so much alone, and to forego that life of pleasure they two had once shared. The unsuspecting man was, as we know, mistaken.

The thing that was preying upon the doctor was his growing passion for Rhea, and the jealousy he felt at her intimacy with Felix Barthey.

He was persuaded that the artist was paying court to Madame Deblain; besides, he heard it hinted that the prolonged stay of the Parisian

at the Malle had given rise to great suspicion. It appeared to him impossible, with his low opinion of woman's virtue, that this artist—gay, handsome, and enterprising—should not very soon be master of this frivolous and coquettish American, who could not possibly love her husband.

Then he was furious at Raymond's blindness—a blindness he would have been glad of, had he been the favoured lover he supposed Felix to be. However, he saw plainly he could neither play the part of informer, nor of Cato, without either getting himself laughed at or denounced.

At last, no longer able to contain himself, he determined to have a decisive explanation with Rhea.

The occasion was soon offered to him, for, about the end of October, Mrs. Gould-Parker had returned for a few weeks to Paris, and her sister had taken up her abode at Vermel; but she went every day to the Malle, where Felix was finishing the curtain of the theatre. The opening of this famous theatre was fixed to take place during the Christmas holidays.

Madame Deblain intended to imitate the English fashion, and have parties at her country-house during the winter, which plan met with great applause from her friends,

The young lady was therefore constantly going to and from the château. Very often she had lunch there, and only returned to town for dinner, with her "great artist," as she called Felix.

One morning Plemen entered his friend's house just as Rhea was about to drive off in her phaeton.

"Ah! is that you, doctor?" said she with a smile, on seeing her neighbour, whom she had not seen for several days. "So early as this! To what do we owe this good fortune?"

"Simply, dear Madame," replied Eric, pressing the hand which Raymond held out to him, "simply because my patients leave me a little liberty to-day."

"Then go with me to the Malle. You shall see my theatre."

Madame Deblain thus met half-way the desire Plemen felt to be alone with her.

"Come," said Raymond, "be amiable for once! It is a fine day, you will have a pleasant drive. Besides, I shall be glad to have your opinion on what my wife calls her 'splendid theatre.'"

"All right," said Eric, wondering to himself at Raymond's blindness; and, as Rhea made room for him on her left, he got into the car.



riage. The groom jumped into his seat, and Rhea, saluting her husband with her whip, drove out of the courtyard.

Five minutes later, the phaeton was spinning along the high-road to the château.

Whilst keeping a firm hand over her horses, Rhea chatted with her usual liveliness. She told her companion of her great theatrical projects; she related to him the surprises she had in store for her guests, who would come not only from Vermel, but from Paris. She spoke with delight of the fury of these idiotic provincials, and mean little households of petty judges, such as the Lachausées, the Babous, and others, who were compelled to be puritanical and hypocritical; of their fury when they saw that she was visited not only by the families of the great manufacturers of the country but also by a good number of the ladies of the old aristocracy.

It was true that Madame Deblain had conquered all the best society in Vermel by her elegance, her beauty, her irreproachable conduct, and her inexhaustible charity to the poor, and they therefore forgave her rather worldly ways.

Plemen listened, and only answered her in approval of what she said, but he spoke rather mechanically. He was thinking of the very

different things he wished to converse about, but, with the servant close at hand, it was impossible to speak ; he therefore decided to put off to a more opportune moment the explanation he was determined to have with his friend's wife.

Rhea had never seemed to him more lovely than as he looked at her perfect profile and her figure, which was well defined by her jacket of dark red velvet, trimmed with fur.

Being seated on a high cushion, she looked down on him. With her bright complexion, her red lips, the little curls of black hair which escaped here and there from her fur cap, her arms gracefully extended, in the efforts she was obliged to make to keep her horses in hand—a movement which threw forward her bust—she was most seductive.

Seeing her thus, Eric, in spite of his desire to be alone with her, fancied that but a few minutes had passed since they left Vermel, when the carriage, having passed the gates of La Malle, stopped before the entrance to the château.

The groom was already at the horses' heads, and Madame Deblain had alighted before Plemen awoke from his dream.

"Well, doctor, are you not coming?" said

Rhea as she slowly ascended the marble stairs.

Instead of going round the house to get to the theatre, at the end of the garden, she was going to pass through the hall, which, dividing the ground-floor of the house into two parts, was the means of communication with the two sides of the building.

Closed on each side by wide double glass doors, this hall was like a large room, which, even at this season, and at noon, was but dimly lighted.

Madame Deblain had just entered the hall when Plemen overtook her.

They were alone; the servants were busy about the carriage, and the porter, after closing the gates, had returned to his lodge. The cook and the rest of the servants who had remained at the Malle to wait on Felix Barthey and his men, all lived in the basement. As to the artist and his two helpers, they were at work in the theatre.

"This Monsieur Barthey must make you pay pretty handsomely for all this daubing," said Plemen to Rhea, taking her gently by the arm.

"Oh, daubing!" she replied, laughing. "How you talk! My painter is a very great artist! His work is beautiful, as you will see."

"All the more reason for the price of his work being very high."

"You are mistaken; Monsieur Barthey is doing it all because of his friendship for us. Our theatre has become his also."

"It is from mere friendship that he has quitted all his friends, all his occupations in Paris, for months past?"

"Absolutely; for mere friendship."

"I cannot believe it!"

"Then what do you think is his motive?"

Madame Deblain's voice sounded a little anxious. She took a step forward, but Eric, whose paleness she did not observe, stopped her again, saying:

"Because he loves you!"

"Monsieur Barthey loves me!" she exclaimed; "my good friend, you are mad!"

"Yes, I am mad! Mad with love and jealousy! Ah, forgive me for speaking so abruptly, but for six months this secret has been stifling me! I love you, and your intimacy with this man tortures me!"

Plemen had seized Rhea's hand, and he felt it tremble in his own. He thought it was from fear, for she kept silence, and tried to escape from his grasp.

"You can understand that for a man like me

to come to such a confession, love must be even stronger than will. Before you came to Vermel, I lived only for my work and ambition. Ah, I was far from imagining that so powerful a feeling as that with which you have inspired me could ever take possession of my being! I, the indefatigable worker, the learned man, as you call me; the sceptic, the invulnerable man, as I believed myself to be, I love—I love to madness! And I love a woman who is bound to one man, and whose heart is another's!"

"Ah! that is not true, I swear to you!" she answered as she withdrew her hand.

"If Monsieur Barthey is not your lover, then he is your sister's," said Eric roughly.

Madame Deblain uttered a cry of horror, and, returning to Plemen, she took his hands, asking him in terrified accents:

"Who dares say that? You? Oh, no, you *cannot* think it. You have never heard any one accuse Jenny, have you? You do not know the danger she would incur if such a calumny were spread about! Her husband would kill her for a mere suspicion! My poor little sister! Come now, tell me, *is there* any one who doubts the good conduct of Madame Gould-Parker? Ah, it is too horrible "

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Rhea's beautiful eyes were filled with tears, and her voice was broken with sobs.

Not understanding this violent emotion, Plemen kept silence.

"I beg of you to tell me," repeated Madame Deblain, placing her hands on the doctor's shoulders, "has any one ever said before you that Jenny had been false to her husband?"

"No; no one has ever uttered a word of the kind," said Eric at last, "and I do not believe any one has ever thought it; it is you who have been suspected—who are suspected!"

"I! Oh, if it is I, I care not!"

She uttered these words with a nervous laugh.

"What, it is a matter of indifference to you! But to *me*—to me, who love you! I was right, then!"

"You are no more right than are those who dare to suspect my sister. Come now, let us talk to each other as friends should. Do you imagine I had not found out the affection you feel for me?"

*"Affection!"*

"Well, love, then! Women always see such things as that; and if you had not kept away from us like a savage; if you had been one of us, as you used to be; if you had been at our fêtes, our parties, and had helped us in our

work, you would soon have seen that there is nothing between Monsieur Barthey and me but a kind of good-fellowship, which is the result of our having the same kind of disposition and tastes. Do you suppose that, if I were in love with my great painter, I should be as familiar with him as I am? You can know nothing of us daughters of Eve! Do we not always in public wear a mask of indifference towards the one for whom we care most?"

"If that be the case, I have a right to believe that you love me; for it would be impossible to give any one a more icy reception than you have given me for a long time past!"

It would be difficult to express the bitter irony with which the doctor spoke these last words.

"You are again mistaken," said Madame Deblain, becoming mistress of herself; "I ought not to love you, and I will not. I will never betray the confidence nor bring dishonour on the name of him who is your friend and my husband; still, I do not hesitate to tell you that if, while I was free, I had met you, no other man could have touched my heart."

"Rhea! My dear Rhea!" cried Eric, wild with joy, as he tried to clasp her in his arms.

"Ah, pardon me," said she, evading his em-



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brace; "if I have made this confession to you, it is because I feel strong enough to defend myself; it is because I wish to calm you, to appease your jealousy, and to remain your friend. Will you let it be so?"

She frankly and kindly held out her hand to him, and he took it in his, covered it with kisses, and spoke not a word; but he was conquered.

"There, that is well!" said she with an adorable smile; "now give me your arm, and we will go and see my theatre, and pay our compliments to Monsieur Barthey!"



## CHAPTER VII

## SUDDEN AMBITION

FROM the earliest days of December, the winter season had begun at Vermel, in the most brilliant manner. Never had there been so many parties and dances in the chief town of Seine et Loire.

Fathers and husbands grumbled a little, because all these gaieties cost money; but the young ladies were delighted, and the tradespeople, who benefited by these unwonted expenses, spoke rapturously of Madame Deblain, to whom the town owed these numerous pleasures, which had been so rare before her arrival.

Her example had been contagious. Certain great families, whose houses had remained almost closed, now opened them; and the public functionaries—the prefect, the mayor, the receiver-general—in order not to be eclipsed, had hastened to give their official balls.

Rhea and her sister—for the latter was as often at Vermel as at Paris—were the queens of these parties; they were graciously welcomed at the houses of the Comtesse de Blernay and the Baroness de Lorge—the two ladies who represented the aristocracy of the place; and at the prefecture Madame Gould-Parker held a certain rank, by right of her husband's diplomatic position; but the social success of the two Americans multiplied the number of their enemies among the lower middle class.

Madame Dusortois was desperately angry, first because her daughter did not get married, and then because she had learnt, through the indiscretion of M. Deblain's notary, that her nephew, shortly after his return from the United States, had made arrangements for leaving to his wife all his property, even though she should not have children—therefore all hope of inheritance for her or hers was lost; and, when she talked of this disappointment with some of her dear friends who shared her hatred of the foreigner, Raymond's aunt did not scruple to insinuate that if her niece did not become a mother, it was doubtless because she did not choose to be so, since she had plenty of lovers! Were there not Dr. Plemen and the handsome Felix Barthey?

In fact, the artist was at every party given in Vermel. He seemed to have forgotten Paris, and not to care to be anywhere except at the Deblains; he was extremely attentive to both the sisters, but especially so to Rhea, and this gave rise to many ill-natured remarks.

As to the doctor, who, for more than a year, had lived quite alone, absorbed in his work, hardly seeing anything of Raymond, whatever friendly advances he might make, he had resumed his neighbourly ways; had become gay, talkative, sceptical, and more worldly than ever.

When the question arose of distributing the parts of "Frou-Frou," which was to be the opening play at the famous theatre, the doctor offered to take the part of Sartorys, which was very well suited to his rather serious countenance, and to his disposition.

Had his love for Rhea grown calmer? Was he less afraid to be near her; or, being more master of himself, could he the better dissimulate? and was he desirous of being constantly in her society and sharing her pleasures, so that he might watch over and defend her with jealous care, against any preference she might show for another than himself?

No one could have answered these questions

except, perhaps, Rhea herself, who could always see that he regarded her with anxious and passionate eyes ; yet she was very grateful to him for making no farther manifestation of a sentiment whose violence had once been expressed during the few moments they were alone in the hall of the château.

For a woman of Madame Deblain's nature—who owed her precocious experience to her American education, whom no snare could entangle, and who was incapable, if not from virtue, at least from self-respect and pride, of yielding to sensual passion—a man's love was only dangerous if this man were her superior ; one capable of devotion and self-sacrifice, yet not inclined to pose as a hero and martyr ; and, above all, if he were patient and could wait for the weak moment which sooner or later comes to every feminine heart in which the feeling of duty does not reign supreme.

Now Rhea had been quite sincere when she told Eric that, if she had known him before her marriage, she would have preferred him to all others ; for this Sclavonian was very handsome, a man of great intellect, of boundless ambition, capable of passionate love, and, consequently, quite her ideal husband.

However, she was by no means sufficiently

in love with him to dream of being false to her marriage vows; yet she felt a certain pride in being the object of such devoted love, and she could not help comparing her husband, a rather commonplace, middle-class man, with this sort of Doctor Faust who had descended to earth for her, and with whom, had he been her husband, she would have had her pride thoroughly gratified by being placed in a position more worthy of her beauty than was this provincial town in which she was condemned to live.

These thoughts, or rather feelings—for Madame Deblain did not reason about the ideas which were passing in her mind—naturally led her to try to awaken the ambition of Raymond, and to suggest to him the idea of offering himself as a Parliamentary candidate, in order at once to raise him in her estimation, and, by going to Paris to live, to escape—not from danger, she did not believe in it—but simply from the worry she sometimes felt about Plemen's love.

But when she mentioned the subject, her husband said, with his usual frankness and good-humour :

“Well, now, that is an idea I have often had since I knew of your great love for Paris, where, by the way, I should not be sorry to

play a part myself. Unluckily, this place returns but one member, and that member will be our friend. Eric is at the head of the Republican Conservative party; his election is certain; we have been working for it these two years. After having been his most active agent, I cannot enter the lists against him, to say nothing of our long-standing friendship, which would forbid me to undermine him. Besides, were we both to become candidates, the electors' votes would be divided between us, and thus we should give a fine chance to our opponents."

"But suppose the doctor were to withdraw from the contest?" said Rhea.

Deblain remained silent with surprise.

"Yes; suppose he were to give up, leave the field open to you, and become, in his turn, your electoral agent?" continued she. "Don't you think that, between us, he and I could secure your election? Oh, I know how it is done! In Philadelphia I have often seen elections, and nothing would please me better than canvassing on my own account, or, rather, on yours."

"Yes, no doubt," at last replied Deblain, who was amused at the political enthusiasm of his wife, and whose vanity was beginning to awaken; "yes, no doubt we should succeed.

But why has this idea of making of me a political personage so suddenly seized you?"

"First from pride, because you are much more fit to be in Parliament than many others, and——"

"And then, because, if I were in Parliament, you would live in Paris, near your sister."

"True enough!"

"You have already had enough of Vermel, and yet you have completely changed the ways of the people here. But how about your theatre?"

"We should come back here every summer."

"For two months! But, I say, we are talking of all this as if Eric did not exist."

"I will manage him, if you will give me permission."

"Pshaw! You fancy that, for a woman's whim—for he will guess that the idea is yours—he will give up a plan he has cherished for ten years! Don't you know that our friend left Paris, where every success awaited him, and came to Vermel with the express intention of becoming our representative?"

"Yes, I know that."

"For this political ambition he sacrificed the Institute, a professorship at the School of Medicine, the decoration of the Legion of Honour,



a great fortune—for in Paris doctors take large fees—perhaps a wealthy marriage; and you want me to ask him to forget the great object of his life! I should not dare to do it!”

“I tell you I will manage it.”

“All right! But *I* tell you plainly that, if Plemen question me, I shall stoutly deny ever having entertained the idea of taking his place.”

“Then that is settled! I shall see the doctor presently. We are rehearsing ‘Frou-Frou.’ He is to play Sartorys; and, let me tell you, our learned friend is a capital actor.”

“I have no doubt of it; he is the most intelligent fellow I ever knew. He would make a first-rate member of Parliament, whilst I——”

“You! You shall become Prime Minister—if I *will* have it so!”

Madame Deblain said this in a tone at once so positive and so comic that her husband accompanied her retreat with a loud burst of laughter.

The day before the opening of the theatre had arrived: Barthey, who was to play Valreas, had gone to Paris expressly to fetch his friend, George Guillemot, who had been an actor at the Gymnase, who had seen Desclée as Frou-Frou, and was good enough to superintend the stage management.

The famous day was fixed—the 26th of



December. All the amateur artists were most punctual at rehearsals, whether they took place at the Malle or at the town-house, where they sometimes met to go over certain scenes about which the actors did not feel quite sure.

For these partial rehearsals they met in the conservatory, which opened from the rooms on the ground-floor.

The doctor had sent word by his valet that he would be there at three o'clock. It was very near that time, and Rhea knew that he would be more likely to come in too soon than to be late.

In fact, just as her husband was getting into his carriage, Madame Deblain saw her neighbour coming through the garden towards the hall.

She herself opened the door to him.

"You see, Madame," said Eric, as he gallantly kissed her hand, "that Sartorys does not keep Frou-Frou waiting."

"You are a model artist," answered the young lady coquettishly. "I shall inspire you. But I do not want Sartorys just now; I want to talk to Plemen."

"The doctor?"

"No, the friend."

"Say on; you know you need only give your orders to your friend."

Plemen placed Rhea's hand on his arm, and they went into the drawing-room to pass to the conservatory, where were Jenny, Barthey, and the Baron de Manby—a charming old gentleman belonging to the best society of the town, who was a great admirer of Rhea. The Baron had undertaken the part of Brigard, in which he was as good as Ravel, and, in fact, he was rather like him.

"Well," said Rhea, stopping in the middle of the drawing-room, "this is what I want to say to you. Raymond is ambitious, and would like to be in Parliament; but as the vacant seat here is meant for you, he refuses to become a candidate, not wishing to oppose you."

"Was it your husband who originated this idea?" asked Eric, without seeming surprised at this strange confidence, but still looking fixedly at the young woman.

She could not help blushing. Then, after a moment's hesitation, she replied, laughing:

"The truth is, I am not quite innocent of having stirred up his ambition!"

"I thought so! And this is because you are so fond of Paris! You really mean to ask me to give up my candidature, so as to leave the place open to Raymond?"

"I don't *ask* you for anything; I only tell you what I wish."

"That is exactly the same thing. Be it so ; but supposing I do as you wish, and that those who would vote for me, give their votes to Deblain ; he will be elected, you will leave Vermel, and then, what is to become of me ? "

"Of you ? "

"Yes, of me. You know very well I cannot live without seeing you. You have brought me back to the worldly life I had quitted, because of the fear I had of betraying myself ; to be with you a few moments longer, I consent to play in a comedy, as if I were a mere idler ; and you would have me remain here alone ! "

"But allow me to remark, my dear friend, that, if it is you who are elected, it is you who will go away, whilst I shall stay here. We should be none the less separated."

"That is true, but you go so often to Paris ! If I did get into Parliament, I should make such a stir, and should rise so high, that your heart would beat a little for me in hearing my name pronounced. Would you have me give up that hope ? "

Plemen had taken Rhea's hand ; he was pressing it so convulsively, and was speaking in such an excited manner, that she said to him, in terror :

"Take care, we shall be seen from the conservatory : they may hear you ! "

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“ Your sister and the gentlemen, if they look at us, will think I am rehearsing my part—that of Sartorys, the jealous husband,” replied Eric bitterly. “ You want me to make way for Raymond ; well, I consent ! But what will you give me in exchange ? ”

“ Oh ! You want to make a bargain ! ”

Rhea had regained her self-command. She took her hand from Plemen’s, placed it on his arm, and drew him towards the conservatory.

“ You do not answer me,” said the doctor, holding the fastening of the door which Madame Deblain wished to open.

“ There are things which cannot be sold, because, whatever price might be offered, one would refuse it ; but they are *given* freely, and my affection is one of those things.”

After having murmured these words, she gently pushed Plemen aside ; and, running into the conservatory, she sat down at the table, where Jenny, Barthey, and the Baron de Manby were sitting ; she snatched up a paper, and, using it as a fan, she exclaimed :

“ It is I—I ; here is the *Moniteur*—no, not the *Moniteur*—here is ‘ Frou-Frou ! ’ ”

In order the sooner to forget what had been said to her by Plemen, the enchantress was already playing her part.

## CHAPTER VIII

### FROU-FROU" AT THE DEBLAINS

FROM seven o'clock in the evening of the 26th of December, on a fine, but extremely cold, starlit night, the road which led from Vermel to the Malle presented a scene of unusual animation.

Passing through the long shadows of the trees, which the rays of the moon defined as clearly as the sun could have done; driving furiously, and flashing out light from cut-glass lamps, there were carriages of every description; for which astonished waggoners made way, by drawing up their heavy vehicles to the side of the road.

These carriages were conveying such of Rhea's guests to the Malle as were only invited for the evening. The more intimate friends, and those who were to play in "Frou-Frou," had dined at the château early, so as to be quite ready when it was time for the play

to begin. Some of them, such as the Baron de Manby, had carried their devotion for *art* to the height of hardly dining at all.

"Real actors," said the excellent Brigard, in tones of perfect conviction, as he declined with a sigh to partake of a bird of most savoury aspect, "real actors should take a very light dinner; but they make up for it at supper. Actors always sup well!"

"Oh, you shall sup; we shall sup, my dear Baron," Madame Deblain hastened to reply; she had never looked more gay and beautiful.

The Baron de Manby was on her right, Plemen on her left; opposite to her, her husband was seated, having on one side of him his sister-in-law, Madame Gould-Parker, who was to play the part of the Baroness of Cambri; and on the other the young and pretty Madame Mortier, one of Rhea's most intimate friends, the wife of a rich manufacturer of Vermel, who was to play Louise; then the charming Madame Langerol, who had kindly accepted the part of Pauline, and whose husband, one of the principal lawyers of Vermel, was a very old friend of M. Deblain.

At seven o'clock Madame Deblain gave the signal for her actors to rise from dinner. Raymond, who was much amused and interested,

but who had nothing to do in the play, remained in the dining-room with the friends who, like himself, were to be spectators, until it was time for him to go and receive the guests who were arriving.

The garden in front of the house was brilliantly lighted ; on the right of the entrance-hall was a large dressing-room for the ladies—they could there give a last glance at their dress, and leave their furs and cloaks ; for the theatre was entered through a long gallery, filled with flowers, like a winter garden.

The play was to begin at half-past eight. At eight o'clock the first carriages entered the gates, and soon the lower rooms presented a brilliant appearance.

All the highest society of Vermel was represented at the Malle by its most elegant and prettiest women.

Invitations to this *soirée*, so unprecedented in that part of the world, had been eagerly sought after, and Rhea had been obliged to decide that the three hundred seats in the theatre should be occupied entirely by ladies, and that the men should dispose of themselves as best they could.

In the first rows, however, some armchairs were placed for a few aged persons of the



aristocracy, and for certain high functionaries accompanied by their wives.

Madame Deblain, who was constantly thinking of her husband's election, had taken advantage of the opportunity to make friends in every direction. Her invitations had been extended to the official world, as well as to the magistracy and the army.

She had even gone to see Madame Dusortois, and had insisted on her coming with her daughters to the Malle; and, as Raymond had backed his wife's invitation with a present of a hundred louis, so that his terrible aunt might not be able to plead poverty and the impossibility of getting proper dresses for her daughters, the old lady, in acid tones, had thanked her nephew, and had come, partly from vanity and partly that she might criticize it all.

Madame Dusortois, unfortunately, was not the only one who came in this hostile spirit. She knew that she would find one to agree with her, if not that evening, certainly the next day, in her intimate friend, Madame Babou, the wife of the examining magistrate, whom Rhea had also invited, but who had declined the invitation, on the plea that she had no carriage in which she could drive into the country in mid-winter.



The real truth was, that the envious wife of the magistrate had grown to hate Rhea more and more—not merely because she was so outdone by her in beauty and elegance, and because, in subscription lists for charitable purposes, Rhea's name, inscribed for five or ten louis, was, by some fatality, always just before her own—but also because her husband, of whom she was absurdly jealous, and who delighted in teasing her, would often amuse himself by talking to her of the beauty and wit of the hateful American.

Thus, M. Babou, on that evening, had come to the Malle partly from curiosity and partly to vex his wife; also he wished to accompany his chief, the first president, Monsel, who was at once a very strict magistrate and a very gallant gentleman, and who, on this occasion, was most attentive to Rhea.

However, the great majority of Rhea's guests had very friendly feelings towards her, and she was rather dismayed at the numbers who accepted her invitation to the Malle for the 26th of December; but on thinking that the play would be followed by a dance and a supper for everybody, she took heart and troubled herself about nothing except the matter of making sure that all the ladies should find seats.

Everything was conducted according to her instructions, and with perfect order. By half-past eight there was not a vacant seat. Whilst waiting for the raising of the curtain, the spectators were busy admiring the beautiful little theatre, constructed on Felix Barthey's plans, and decorated by him with exquisite taste.

The auditorium, of horse-shoe shape, had neither boxes nor gallery, but only, on a slightly inclined plane, fifteen rows of fauteuils, around and down the centre of which was a passage, as in the orchestras of Italian theatres, so that people could easily get to their seats. Then, independent of these fauteuils, there were others, placed against the wall all round the house. The decorations were bright in tone without being glaring. The curtain, a copy of Winterhalter's celebrated picture, represented the personages of the "Decameron" listening to Fiametta, to whom Felix Barthey had given the features of the mistress of the Malle, a circumstance which caused the good Madame Dusortois to screw up her lips.

The house, lighted by electricity, was so fresh and gay, that the audience had not got over their surprise when the usual three blows announced that the piece was about to begin.

The curtain rose, and two minutes afterwards

Rhea's entrance was hailed with enthusiastic applause. She looked lovely in the riding-habit which moulded her figure, and, with her saucy little face under her riding-hat, she was an ideal Frou-Frou. When, rather more moved than she wished to appear, and owing her high colour more to this emotion than to paint or to the exercise she is supposed to have taken, she exclaimed gaily—even more gaily than she had done a few weeks before, after having escaped from Plemen—"It is I!—it is I! here is the *Moniteur*!" the applause recommenced.

She had everything the part needed—attitudes, charm of manner, voice. And the piece, thus begun, went on wonderfully well. Barthey was a splendid Valréas, full of animation; the Baron de Manby a very Parisian, very amusing Brigard; Madame Gould-Parker, an elegant and beautiful Baroness de Cambri; and Plemen, a sombre but sympathetic Sartorys.

As the spectators recognized their friends in the actors, the applause increased.

There was much laughter in the second act, during the scene of the rehearsal of "Indiana and Charlemagne," which Madame Deblain, her sister, and Barthey played excellently. And in the love-scene of the third act, Valréas (Barthey) was so true and so tender to Rhea

(Frou-Frou), that smiles were exchanged by certain persons who did not believe in the virtue of the lovely American.

The gallant first president, with a wink, murmured in the ear of his neighbour, M. Babou :

"The little woman really is charming, and the Parisian artist is much to be envied. Poor Monsieur Deblain !"

Rather free kind of talk this on the part of a magistrate so *very* moral as M. Monsel affected to be ; but the same idea was just then being expressed by Madame Dusortois, who was saying :

"Fancy, my fool of a nephew believing that all this is only play-acting !"

Then came the scene in which Sartorys, resisting the entreaties of Gilberte, and dragging himself from her arms, throws her down on the sofa, as he rushes off to fight a duel with Valréas.

Plemen was really grand in this scene. A strange light shone in his eyes, and at the despairing cry of his guilty wife, "Oh, do not leave me ; I will love you !" he threw her off so abruptly, and with such strength and anger, that as Rhea fell on the sofa there was among the audience a shiver of alarm, before the applause burst out.

The scene had been played with such intense truthfulness that M. Deblain, fearing his wife had been hurt, could hardly wait till the end of the act to rush behind the scenes.

The curtain had just fallen, and Rhea, feeling more excited than she had felt since the commencement of the piece, was just running off the stage to her dressing-room to change her dress, when she found herself face to face with Plemen, behind a screen.

"You have hurt me," said she, showing him her bruised wrists.

"Forgive me," replied Eric in a low tone as he prevented her from passing; "forgive me; but from the moment I saw you in your scene with Barthey I was half mad; and when you said to me just now, 'Do not leave me; I will love you!' instead of flying from you, as my part commanded me to do, I came near clasping you in my arms, before all those people who were looking at us! I felt as though my reason was deserting me!"

"Oh! really it is not prudent to act plays with you. Come, let me pass!" said Madame Deblain in a cheerful way, although she was trembling a little.

"'Do not leave me; I will love you!' what would I not give to hear you say these words

to me!" said the doctor, seizing her hands again.

"Take care; here comes my husband!" said she, abruptly disengaging her hands.

Raymond, who had been looking for his wife, just then saw her.

He approached, saying to Plemen with his usual good-humour:

"Ah, a nice kind of husband you would be! If we were all like that! I was quite afraid Frou-Frou was seriously hurt; I am sure her arms must be bruised!"

"That is what I was apologizing for," replied Eric, who had resumed his self-command, and was pretending to be examining Rhea's wrists, as if he had taken her hands with that intention only. "A little powder on the wrists, and it will not show at all! Your wife has been telling me it is not prudent to act plays with me. She is right; I am too nervous. It seemed to me all reality."

Madame Deblain could hardly restrain a shudder on hearing the doctor explain himself with such perfect coolness, and she escaped as her husband, taking the arm of his friend, was saying, with his frank, honest laugh:

"If I did not already adore my wife, I believe I should fall in love with her this very day!

Wasn't she lovely? Nobody but an American could be as clever as she is! My aunt Dusortois can't stand it at all; I'll bet you anything that she thinks she will be damned, because she has a niece who is a good actress!"

A few moments after, the curtain rose for the last act, in which Rhea looked most touching; and so moved her audience that, after having applauded and recalled her enthusiastically, they thought the end too sad for an evening that was to be continued by a ball.

But less than half an hour later, when the dances were beginning, people thought only of Frou-Frou, in order to compliment Madame Deblain, who, in a beautiful dress, was gayer and prettier than ever, as she entered the rooms on Felix Barthey's arm.

"They are going on with the play," said M. Monsel to the examining judge. "What fun it would be to have to interrogate a little woman like that, in one's own office, in a case of adultery!"

M. Babou, a prudent magistrate, answered this coarse joke of the first president only by a smile.

At four in the morning supper was served, and three hours later, as the day was breaking, the road from the Malle to Vermel was again

traversed by the carriages taking back to the town Rhea's guests, who most reluctantly left the château, so much had they enjoyed their visit.

Whilst these amusements were going on at his brother-in-law's, and his wife was being so easily consoled for his absence, the terrible Colonel Gould-Parker, tortured by jealousy, was conscientiously inspecting the military establishments of Japan, where he had arrived some weeks before.



## CHAPTER IX.

## JENNY'S CONFESSIONS

FOR a month there was no talk of anything in Vermel but the way in which "Frou-Frou" had been played at the Malle; but if this entertainment, given in mid-winter, in the country—a fashion which is being followed in France now—increased the enthusiasm of Madame Deblain's admirers, it also had the effect of provoking harsh criticism, and stirring up the hatred of the envious.

Whilst the real friends of Raymond were unanimous in praise of his wife—of the pleasant way in which she received her guests, of her elegance, her beauty, and her wit—the *citizen clan*, the slaves of *cant*, thought her ways perfectly scandalous; and the two sisters were the objects of the most malicious insinuations on the part of the *good* souls who were influenced by Madame Dusortois.

That was *her* way of showing gratitude for

the welcome Rhea had given her, and of thanking her nephew for the hundred louis with which he had presented her, in order that her daughters might appear at the château as well dressed as any one.

"Is it not shameful to throw money about in such a manner!" repeated the kind aunt to any one who would listen to her, and even to some who would rather not have listened. "Ah, my nephew is in good hands! He makes a good deal of money, but I am sure he will soon be ruined! Poor Raymond, how blind he is! How his wife deceives him about that Barthey—that Parisian dauber! And then her sister, that Madame Gould-Parker, whose husband is nobody knows where! There is a nice household for you! Perhaps she is not married at all, for these Americans have *such manners!* And to think that Dr. Plemen does not open his friend's eyes! But then, again, he is just——"

Madame Dusortois stopped there with such an ironical smile, that every one knew just what she meant, but did not dare to say.

Many of her auditors, voluntary or involuntary, shrugged their shoulders in disgust at her malice; but these calumnies none the less made their way, unknown to Raymond and

Rhea, who continued to give parties, dinners, and theatrical representations, which Plemen contented himself with seeing, but in which he very seldom took a part—Rhea and Barthey being always indefatigable in the matter.

Plemen had ceased to be jealous of the artist, and they lived together on excellent terms; he troubled himself no farther about Barthey's frequent visits at the Malle, where, truly, the painter was more often to be found than at his studio, in the Rue d'Offémont, in Paris.

That winter was a memorably brilliant season for Vermel. By March the young ladies were still eager for pleasure, thanks to the strength with which, in so good a cause, Nature has endowed the weaker sex; but the men—husbands, brothers, cousins—they were worn out, and craved for rest, even while admitting that the Deblains were the most delightful hosts, and Rhea the most adorable hostess in the world.

This desire for a little peace and quietness had, as its logical consequence, the fact that M. Deblain's candidature was received with growing approbation. With such a wife, the great manufacturer would certainly make an excellent figure in Paris; he would soon acquire great influence in Parliament, from which

Vermel would reap considerable advantages ; to say nothing of the honour of being represented by so rich a man, and the husband of such an irresistible creature, that Ministers would be able to refuse her nothing !

Rhea, who quite understood the public mind, was delighted ; and Raymond, who was beginning to feel very ambitious, was half inclined to believe that the idea of becoming a political celebrity had been originated by himself.

Was he not really more fit to be a member of Parliament than his friend Plemen ? Were there not already too many doctors and lawyers in Parliament ? Was it not likely that great manufacturers like himself would have more knowledge of the real interests of the country than a lot of bookworms and chatterers ?

M. Deblain was grateful to the doctor for giving up the position to him ; but he conscientiously believed that, in acting thus, Eric showed himself no less patriotic than friendly.

The good man, quite carried away by his own arguments, already saw himself an important person at the head of the Conservative party.

"Ah ! The Ministry will have to look out ! There shall be an end of distant expeditions ; of waste of money ; of snug sinecures for sons and nephews—he himself had neither sons nor

nephews; of big salaries; of offices in which there are three hundred clerks where one hundred would suffice for the work; in a word, there shall be an end of all abuses!"

He was especially anxious to have his house become a political centre, where the society should be received and entertained by Rhea and Madame Gould-Parker.

The latter, on the contrary, seemed by no means anxious to return to Paris; she very seldom went there, and had quite taken up her abode at the Malle.

It is true that at the end of the winter Jenny's health seemed less good, and she was not so gay as she had been when she first appeared at Vermel. It was supposed that the lengthened absence of her husband was causing her great grief. That might be the case.

At all events, that is what Madame Deblain said to everybody with great gravity; although she, perhaps, did not believe one word of it.

However, the colonel was soon coming back to France. He had announced to his wife that his mission was approaching its end. In his last letter, dated from Yeddo, the 1st of March, he said to Jenny:

"I shall have finished my inspection here

in about a fortnight ; then I shall start for Shanghai, but I hope not to remain in China more than a month. After that it will not take me more than six weeks to visit our stations in the north.

"I expect, therefore, to return to Europe about the middle of July, and to be in France by the end of September.

"I shall have been absent more than a year, but I fear that the time has not seemed long to you ; for, with your sister, so gay, so frivolous, so fond of pleasure, you must be having a cheerful life.

"The papers have informed me that you and Rhea have been a good deal mixed up in charity bazaars, organized by the American colony in Paris. Of course it was your duty to help in these things ; but perhaps it would have been more suitable for you, in my absence, to play a less conspicuous part.

"Friends have informed me by letter that in Paris you were at all the parties, and that Madame Deblain, by her eccentric ways, was revolutionizing the town of Vermel. I regret having left you with her ; I ought to have brought you here with me. The place of an honest woman is with her husband, unless she can live quite in seclusion during his absence.

"Forgive me for speaking so plainly to you, but you know my feelings about you, and the care I have for my honour. I do not doubt for a moment the rectitude of your conduct; I merely deplore that you have perhaps failed in that reserve which would have placed you beyond the reach, not only of insulting suspicions, but of the slightest critical remark. I doubt not that you will easily dissipate the anxieties I feel while I am far from you; and that, on my return, everything will prove to me that you have worthily borne the name of him who now greets you affectionately."

It was the 15th of April, and Jenny had read—perhaps for the tenth time—these lines, on which her eyes seemed fixed as in terror, when her sister suddenly entered her room.

"What is the matter now?" said she to her on perceiving her emotion.

Madame Gould-Parker gave Rhea her husband's letter.

"What! Is it still the colonel's sermon you are poring over? Oh, I know all about it; I don't want to taste it again. Let your Othello come back when he likes. What does it matter to you? We two will manage him. Did he fancy you were going to cover yourself with sackcloth and ashes in his absence?"



"Oh, don't laugh. If you only knew!"

"If I only knew what? Is it possible—that——"

Jenny rose suddenly, ran to a little rosewood desk, opened it, and took out a packet of letters, which she placed, with deep blushes, on her sister's lap.

"Oh, oh, oh," she cried, with comic gravity, after having glanced at these letters, of which it was easy to guess the contents. "Oh, the poor colonel! My darling sister! But what could have possessed him to go off to Japan when he had such a pretty little wife as you?"

She was laughing wildly, sniffing at the perfume of the letters, and reading bits of them, exclaiming now and then:

"Why, all this is charming, delightful! Nobody ever wrote to me like this—not even cousin Archibald, who pretended to be madly in love with me. Ah, I am sure it must be a Frenchman who expresses himself thus! Why, they are not signed, and your name is never mentioned! It is true that 'My adored one! my darling! my beloved!' are prettier names even than Jenny."

"Of course he thought I should like to keep his letters," said Madame Gould-Parker, in loving accents.



"Well, what is there to hinder you from keeping them? When your husband is nearly home, you can confide to me these precious epistles. I will keep them in the secret drawer of my Italian cabinet, and, now and then, you shall come and read them—if you are still loved, and still in love."

"Oh, pray do not think——"

"Ah, yes, of course. It is an eternal love, made up of self-sacrifice, which asks no sacrifices of the beloved object. I know all about that—by hearsay! Well, now, am I not a devoted, loving sister, and most indulgent? For what I am doing is very wrong. If uncle Jonathan and Miss Gowntall knew!"

"Rhea, my dear Rhea! But supposing your husband were some day to find these letters?"

"First, Raymond would never take the liberty to rummage my drawers; then, if he were to find and read them, he would never believe for a second that they had been addressed to me. My husband is not jealous of his wife! He is not a colonel! He is not in Japan! Besides, he knows very well there is nobody courting me.

"Oh! How about Dr. Plemen?"

"Ah, you have noticed that?"

"Rather! Has he not betrayed himself ten times—a hundred times!"

"Yes; but our learned friend is wasting his time."

"I am not asking you to tell me anything."

"Plemen is certainly a man of remarkable intelligence and spirit, of great personal beauty. But if I have for Monsieur Deblain only a very temperate amount of affection, still I hold Vermel and its inhabitants in horror. I long to live almost entirely in Paris, and this desire has given me ambition. That is why I flirt a little with the doctor, who is very much in love with me—too much, I fear. I have induced him to withdraw his name as a candidate for election, and my husband will present himself in his stead. Raymond will succeed, I do not doubt. He will be a member of Parliament—but that is not all."

The young woman ended these last words with a burst of laughter.

Her sister fixed on her a look of astonishment from her beautiful eyes.

"What is the matter?" resumed Rhea. "You seem only to half believe me."

"I am thinking, my darling," replied Jenny tenderly, "that you talked just now, whilst mocking me, of 'an eternal love, made up of

self-sacrifice, which asks no sacrifices of the beloved object.'"

At this acute reply, Madame Deblain could not help colouring a little. Then Jenny pressed her in her arms, and, kissing her, said :

"Oh, pardon me! dear sister, pardon me! If any one loves me, how is it that every one does not adore you!"

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## *PART II*

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### CHAPTER I

#### A COUNTRY ELECTION

It was then early in September, and the electoral period was not to commence till the 15th of the month ; but the agents of the candidates, and the candidates themselves, had nevertheless begun their campaign long before.

One of the City members had been made a Senator ; and, as this had been long foreseen, the Conservative Republicans had kept his vacated seat for the learned doctor of whom they were so proud, and who had given such numerous proofs of his goodness to the poor—for Dr. Plemen.

In face of so formidable an adversary, so highly esteemed by everybody, who had made himself friends both among the lower and the middle classes, notwithstanding his intimacy

THE CASE OF DR. PLEMEN

with the Deblains, the revolutionary Radical party were almost disarmed. Therefore it was only for form's sake, so as not to seem quite to give up all effort, that they had determined to put up a candidate—utterly unimportant, it is true—his defeat being certain.

As to the Legitimists and Bonapartists, if there were a few of them at Vermel, they did not count, from an electoral point of view ; but those of them who thought it wrong to abstain altogether from voting until they could do better, voted on the Republican Conservative side from mere hatred of Radicalism.

The election would have gone off in the quietest way, and no one would have thought much about it, when suddenly it became known that Dr. Plemen was going to retire in favour of M. Deblain.

At first nobody would believe it. The husband of the beautiful American had never manifested the slightest intention or desire to become a political personage. On the contrary, he had always been remarked for his utter indifference to such matters. He had joked people for being such fools as to sacrifice their business, their leisure, their pleasures, to the vanity of being called "the honourable member."

However, we know that nothing was more true than this change of purpose on the part of the rich manufacturer—this sudden ambition, which was the work of his wife. There soon was proof of the truth of the rumour, for Plemen, without waiting to be asked, published in the local journals a letter, in which he announced that he meant to give up in favour of M. Deblain, to whom he warmly urged the electors to give their suffrages.

"If I renounce," said he, "the honour of becoming the representative of a town whose least interests are dear to me, it is because I do not think I should do right to absent myself for several months of each year from my patients; it is because science has more attractions for me than politics; and because I feel convinced that a great manufacturer like M. Deblain, a native of the town, and whose opinions are well known—whose devotion to and knowledge of business are a guarantee for everything—will be, for Vermel, the most useful and most influential member in Parliament."

If the news was not ill received in the higher walks of commerce, where Rhea's husband counted numerous friends ready to support him, it was not so in the lower middle class,

where the hatred of Madame Deblain was reflected on her husband; therefore, the revolutionary Radicals instantly set to work to find a man to oppose Deblain.

It was not easy to find such a person in Vermel; but the committee in Paris soon supplied the deficiency, by sending to the chief town of Seine et Loire the citizen Rubel—a third-rate journalist, of whom the Government had been foolish enough to make a hero and martyr, by condemning him to a few months' imprisonment for seditious writing.

This unknown individual, who had not an idea concerning the interests he would be called upon to defend, and who had, perhaps, never heard of Vermel, would enter on a struggle, not at all hopeless against even such a man as Deblain, simply because he was a victim to the powers that be, and would declaim to a lot of ignorant people, who would understand nothing of the matter, a parcel of worn-out arguments concerning "treason to the Republic."

Thus the electoral campaign, begun by Raymond and his friend under the happiest auspices, soon grew hard and unpleasant.

First, the Conservative Republicans, who would all have been with Plemen, grew cold and divided; then Deblain, who had not been

well since the beginning of the summer, and, besides, had not any real ambition, also grew cold.

In order to answer Citizen Rubel, who, until public meetings could begin, kept calling private meetings, Raymond was obliged to study his lesson with the doctor; and as, without being at all a fool, he was but a poor orator, his speeches did not always have a good effect. He was perfectly conscious of this; and on those days he came home feeling harassed, and ready to send politics to the devil.

Sometimes, however, Plemen would speak: and then his ardour, his convincing eloquence, carried all before him. But these triumphs of Raymond's friend, instead of advancing his cause, did him harm, because people could not help contrasting the two men, and the contrast was all in favour of the doctor.

Rhea spared no pains on her side. Whilst her unfortunate husband was preparing some harangue on political economy, on free-trade, on State loans, on railway communication, on the means of equalizing taxes, and giving aid to the poor—all subjects of which he had heard, but which he understood only very imperfectly—Madame Deblain, escorted by Felix Barthey who had come on purpose to Vermel, was



running about the suburbs, visiting workmen's cottages, emptying her purse in all sorts of miserable dwellings, kissing dirty, ragged children, and pressing horny hands. Sometimes she even got among *ticket-of-leave* men—there were plenty of them at Vermel—taking them for honest electors, and they would speak to her in a tone of insolent, coarse jesting. In a word, she was completely carried away by the electoral fever, and the ambition which filled her mind.

Rhea saw that Raymond's chances were not improving. She was extremely annoyed at it, and scolded him, especially when she heard—as she did after one of the meetings at which Plemen spoke—such exclamations as: "What a splendid speaker!" "What a representative Vermel would have had in him!" "Six months after entering Parliament he would have been in the Ministry!"

She then understood better than ever the difference there was between the two men; and, as she could not help showing her gratitude to Eric, he would reply:

"If we fail, you shall not have the right to blame me. But, to please you, I shall have vainly sacrificed my political career; since you will be condemned to remain at Vermel, where, I fear, I shall not be forgiven for having resigned my candidature."

## *A COUNTRY ELECTION*

However, Madame Deblain would not give way to discouragement; and, in order to be always at hand, she never went to the Malle to stay the night, although her sister was living there entirely. Jenny, who was fatigued by the pleasures of the winter, had not thought that year of going to Trouville, but had preferred remaining in the country.

Since the spring, Jenny had only come into the town two or three times; but Rhea went to see her nearly every day before dinner.

Things were in this state when, one evening, the 22nd of September, Raymond, who for some time had been suffering from violent neuralgia, came home from a public meeting in a state of extreme excitement. Having been drawn into an altercation with his adversary, the Citizen Rubel, he had got so confused that Plemen had been obliged to come to his aid. But skilfully as he might rescue his friend, it was evident that the Radical remained master of the field.

Deblain, who in default of eloquence and political knowledge, had plenty of good sense, was perfectly aware of his failure; so, on arriving at home, overcome with fatigue, he threw himself into an armchair, exclaiming:

"Hang it! I swear that if I could have foreseen what a candidate would have to go

through, I would have kept out of this! My eyes are dazzled by the sight of all the various-coloured placards, on which my name figures in big letters, as if I were an actor on a tour. When I enter one of those cursed halls where the meetings are held, I feel as if I were expected to show conjuring tricks like Robert Houdin, or gymnastic feats on a trapeze like Leotard. My head spins at it all!"

"And this is not the end of it," answered Eric, laughing. "You are only at the beginning of your career."

Just then Madame Deblain entered the smoking-room, where the two friends were waiting to have tea served. She was very pale, and evidently under the influence of some violent emotion.

She approached her husband, and showing him a note she had just received, spoke to him in a low tone, as the servant was in the room.

Raymond read the letter, looked intensely amazed, exchanged a few words with his wife, pointing to Plemen. Then he said aloud:

"I don't want any tea. I shall go to bed. Doctor, you must give me something to soothe me, for I have horrid pains in my stomach, and my head is burning."

"There is nothing much the matter gained

you," replied the doctor, after feeling his friend's pulse. "You are slightly feverish. Evidently politics do not agree with you. Before you go to sleep take a double dose of the chloral that I ordered you; you may also give yourself a slight injection of morphine, as you have become such a skilful doctor. After that you will have a good night, and will be all right in the morning. I will come and see you early to-morrow, or perhaps not till the day after, for to-morrow I mean to take the first train for Paris, where I read an important paper at the Academy of Medicine. I do not know if I shall be able to return the same evening."

"Ah, that is true! Luckily, we have no meeting for to-morrow. Good-by, then, till the day after to-morrow. I leave you with Rhea. She wants to talk to you, and I know all she means to say to you. Good-night to you both."

And, after having kissed his wife and shaken hands with Plemen, Raymond, who had rung for his valet, went up to his room.

Madame Deblain and the doctor were now alone, and Eric, immediately approaching Rhea, whose agitation he only then noticed, said:

"What do you wish to say to me?"

"

fores

"I have serious need of you, my friend."

"Need of me?"

"Yes, about a most serious matter."

Then, putting one hand on Plemen's shoulder, she whispered to him something so completely unexpected that the doctor started in astonishment, master though he always was of himself. Then, after reflecting for a second, he replied with a strange smile that Rhea did not observe :

"Give me time to go to my house, and then I am at your service."

"I will pass through your garden, and go out by the gate in the lane. You must meet me at the end of the Boulevard ; there I will await you with a carriage. I shall leave the door of communication open, so as to be able to get into the house without being seen by anybody."

"I understand."

Five minutes later Dr. Plemen took his place beside Madame Deblain in a carriage of which the driver doubtless had his orders, for he immediately drove off rapidly, although the night was dark and the road ill-lighted.

ended  
with

## CHAPTER II

## THE MYSTERY

THE next day, about eight in the morning, as the coachman, Dumont, and the grooms, having finished their work, were putting back the carriages and horses in their places, at the same time that Nicholas the steward and the footman were arranging the dining-room, they heard a cry of horror on the first-floor, then hurried footsteps on the great staircase, and M. Deblain's valet appeared, pale, with staring eyes, leaning against the rails.

"My master—ah! my master," he stammered, addressing the servants whom the noise had summoned to the hall; "my master is dead! Murdered! Quick, quick, go and fetch Monsieur Plemen!"

Without asking any further explanation, for Raymond was loved by his servants, Nicholas, terror-stricken, rushed across the garden, in order the more quickly to reach the doctor's

house; but he instantly returned, for, by an unlucky chance, the gate was fastened. He then went out at the street-door to the doctor's.

There he was told that M. Plemen had started for Paris by the 7.20 train; that is to say, he had been gone about an hour. No one knew if he would be back that day or no.

The steward stood confused for a moment, then thinking he must not go back to the house without a doctor, and remembering that he had often seen Dr. Magnier, one of the most skilful practitioners in Vermel, he ran to his house, which was but a short distance off, on the same boulevard.

During this time, Pauline, Rhea's maid, terrified by the cries of Pierre, had gone and awakened her mistress, but had not dared to tell her what she had heard; and the young wife, after having slipped on a dressing-gown, had gone into her husband's room, passing through the two dressing-rooms which separated their apartments.

On reaching M. Deblain's room, and drawing near his bed, Rhea was seized with such terror that for some seconds she remained as if paralyzed.

The unfortunate man was lying on his back, his chest uncovered, his arms stretched out on

the silk counterpane; his eyes were closed, his face hardly at all convulsed, his lips slightly open; he looked as though he were asleep. Surmounting her emotion, Rhea lifted up her husband, placed his head upon the pillow, and took his hand; but, on feeling its icy coldness, she let it fall, and, uttering a cry of anguish, she dropped into a seat, wailing in a broken voice:

"Raymond, my poor Raymond! Let some one go and fetch Monsieur Plemen! Run, immediately! Where is Pierre?"

"Pierre has gone to fetch the doctor, Madame, replied the maid.

"Ah, no; now I think of it, Monsieur Plemen was going to Paris to-day. Send for some other doctor, no matter which! Perhaps he is not quite dead! Oh, no, do not leave me here alone! Ring for the steward."

Pauline, who was stupefied with terror, obeyed.

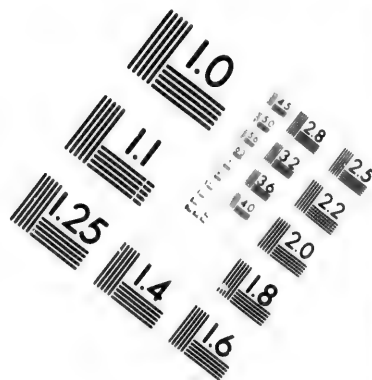
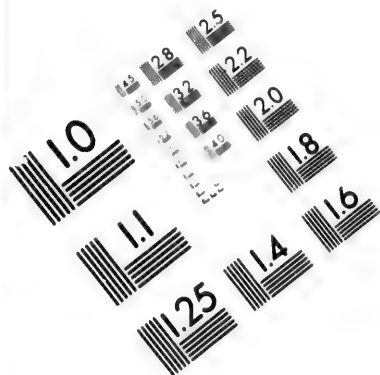
At that moment the valet appeared at the door of the room, saying:

"Monsieur Plemen is not at home; but here is Monsieur Magnier, whom Nicholas went to fetch."

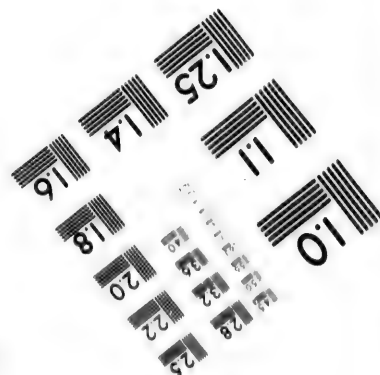
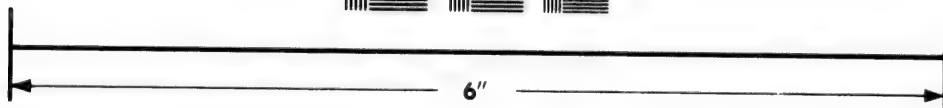
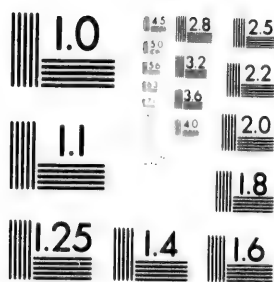
Rhea rushed towards the doctor, pointing to M. Deblain, for she could not speak.

M. Magnier approached the bed, bent over him who lay there; then, rising almost immediately, after only a few seconds' examination,



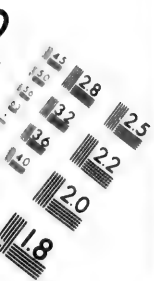


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he turned to Madame Deblain, looking deeply moved, and said :

"You ought not to stay here, Madame."

"What!" said Rhea, in hoarse tones. She had never ceased to regard the doctor, and, in a half-fainting condition, was leaning on the back of a chair.

"Your husband has died of congestion, or of angina pectoris; he has been dead some hours."

"Oh, my God! my God!" cried Rhea, falling on her knees at the bedside; and seizing one of the dead man's hands, she pressed her lips to it.

"I beg of you," said the doctor, gently raising her, "I beg of you to spare yourself this sad sight. Come away. Alas! you can do nothing!"

"Is it possible that he is dead? Dead, dead! My poor Raymond!" repeated Rhea, whilst M. Magnier, having taken her arm in his, was leading her to her bedroom. There she dropped into a seat, and burst into violent weeping.

"Come, Madame, pray be calm! Weep, for that will relieve you; but stay in your room, and give yourself no concern about anything I will give the necessary orders."

"Thanks, Monsieur, thanks," replied Rhea, through her tears. "Will you have the good-

ness to telegraph to Monsieur Plemen? He went to Paris this morning. What grief for him this news will be, for he was very fond of Raymond! Oh, it is horrible! horrible! I *must* see him once again."

She rose abruptly, but her strength failed her, and she fell back almost fainting. With trembling hands she pushed back her hair; her despair was heart-breaking!

M. Magnier did not leave her till he saw her grow more calm, and after having told Pauline to watch her, and send for him immediately if she thought it necessary. He also told the valet-de-chambre what last services he could render to his master.

In less than an hour the whole town knew of the death of M. Deblain, and the event caused deep emotion; for not only was the great manufacturer much esteemed in Vermel, but it might be said he had none but friends in the town, notwithstanding the gossip caused by his great indulgence to his wife, and the jealousy which had been aroused by the splendour of his house-keeping since his marriage.

People being still ignorant of the cause of this sudden death, it was attributed to an attack of apoplexy or the rupture of an aneurism—accidents which might have been brought on by

the excessive fatigue M. Deblain had undergone during the last fortnight, he having been far from well at the beginning of the electoral campaign, which he had gone into rather against his inclination. Every one knew that, on embarking in this affair, he had only yielded to his wife's ambition.

From saying this, it was but a step for Rhea's enemies to accuse her of having caused her husband's death by her follies and eccentricities.

This step was quickly taken, especially by Madame Dusortois. On arriving at the house about half-past ten, she never even thought of asking to see Madame Deblain, but ran straight to her nephew's room, threw herself weeping on the body, and exclaimed, in the hearing of the Sister of Mercy who had been hastily called in, and who was kneeling in prayer :

"My poor Raymond ! To have died without the consolations of religion ! Ah, I was right when I predicted that American woman would bring trouble upon him ! May God have pity on his soul !"

"Madame," said the nun timidly, "the minister of the parish has blessed the departed. We must never doubt the Divine mercy. Be careful ; his poor widow, who is there close at

hand and in great despair, may hear what you are saying."

These words doubtless sufficed to show Madame Dusortois that she must be a little careful what language she used—at least in that house, whence, notwithstanding her relationship, she might be driven by her who now, more than ever, was complete mistress of it; therefore she devoutly took the spray of box which stood in the vase of holy water, and sprinkled the body, with the air of having fulfilled a sacred duty.

Spiteful as was Madame Dusortois, her religion was sincere; in such a matter she could not be accused of hypocrisy. Arming herself with courage to dissemble her real feelings, she sent a message to her niece that she would like to see her.

Rhea, full of her own grief, neither remembered, nor would have allowed herself to remember, at such a time, all the spite and ill-will of which she had been the victim. She therefore said to her husband's aunt that she was grateful for her visit, and she went to meet her on the threshold of her room.

The expression of grief was so deep on the face of the young widow that Madame Dusortois felt a moment's remorse.

"My dear child—my poor niece!" said she, kissing her almost affectionately, "what a dreadful calamity has happened to us!"

"Dreadful indeed!" replied Madame Deblain in a broken voice, as she invited her aunt to sit down by her on the sofa. "Raymond had been ailing for some days, but who could have expected this! And for him to have died alone, in the middle of the night!"

"Alone!" said the old lady in astonishment. "Were you not with him, then—did he not call out?"

"No. It was not till this morning, at eight o'clock, that Pauline, on awakening me——"

"Then at what time last night did you leave Raymond?"

"At what time? Oh, between nine and ten, I think."

"You do not generally go to bed so early as that?"

"No, but we were all very tired."

"All!"

"Yes. Doctor Plemen had come in with Raymond from the meeting."

"Monsieur Barthey, no doubt, was also with you?"

"Monsieur Barthey? No; why should he? He was to start yesterday morning for Paris."

Madame Deblain said these words with such

hesitation that her aunt perceived her embarrassment.

"And Monsieur Plemen was absent, too, it appears?"

"Most unfortunately, he was! If he had been here he might have saved his friend. Oh, I feel as if I were in a horrid dream!"

Rhea again burst out into hysterical weeping, and her head dropped on the shoulder of Madame Dusortois, who said:

"Have courage, my poor child. But you are right—it is horrible! To die so, in the middle of the night, quite alone, without a friendly hand to close his eyes, without a priest at his bedside! However suddenly death may have come, he must have undergone great mental anguish! And you really heard no sound?"

"None whatever. Our rooms, you know, are separated by two dressing-rooms; the doors were probably both shut. If he had uttered one cry, should not I have flown to his aid? Should I have let him die——"

"Well, you must be resigned! Would you like me to do what is necessary—to order the funeral and to send out the letters to friends?"

"Oh, yes, pray do! I should not have courage for it. How kind you are! Forgive me, if I have not always been as good to you as I ought."



"Let us say nothing about that, but rely on me. I will come and stay here, so as to spare you all trouble. Am I not your nearest relation—the sister of our poor Raymond's mother?"

As she said this, Madame Dusortois kissed Rhea with an appearance of real affection, and she was deeply touched. She felt herself less lonely, less forsaken, and she thanked her aunt, while still sobbing bitterly.

Madame Dusortois from that moment became mistress of the house. It was she who received the doctor who came to testify as to the decease of M. Deblain; and in the evening, about seven o'clock, when her niece went to take a last farewell of him who was no more, it was with her that the young widow knelt in prayer beside him.

The unfortunate Rhea had been in the death-chamber nearly half an hour, and she refused to return to her own room, when the door was suddenly opened; she and Madame Dusortois rose and saw Dr. Plemen standing there, bare-headed, frightfully pale, and not daring to advance a step. Rhea stretched out her hands to him, and, after a few seconds' hesitation, he advanced and took her hand; then resting against the bed, he remained staring fixedly at the dead man as if he could not detach his eyes from the sad sight; then suddenly he rose, and

clasping his head in his hands, and uttering a dreadful cry, he fled.

"Ah, how well he loved him!" cried Rhea, again falling on her knees.

Twenty-four hours later two thousand persons followed M. Deblain to his last resting-place; and these obsequies of a man so rich, honoured, happy, who had died in the prime of life, caused the more emotion because, through all the route followed by the procession, were to be seen the great placards which had been posted to proclaim his candidature; and these seemed now to say, with bitter irony, how little right any one had in this world to count on the morrow.

Naturally this death of the Conservative candidate reawakened the courage of the Radicals, especially when they learnt that Dr. Plemen had rejected with horror all idea of taking the place of his lost friend.

Those who were not blinded by political prejudices approved this delicacy of feeling on the part of the eminent doctor, who was so overcome with grief that he never left his home except in obedience to the calls of his professional duty.

As to Rhea, on the evening of the day of her husband's funeral she went to the Malle, where she determined to spend the first few months of her mourning.

## CHAPTER III

IN WHICH THE EXAMINING JUDGE, M. BABOU,  
COMES FORWARD

A FORTNIGHT had elapsed since M. Deblain's funeral, and in consequence of M. Plemen's refusal to come forward as a candidate, the Radical party had been victorious, in the person of the Citizen Rabul, when a rumour spread in Vermel that the Public Prosecutor, M. Duret, incited by anonymous letters which had been sent to him, had ordered an inquiry into the circumstances which had preceded and accompanied the death of M. Deblain.

It was said that the deceased had left all his fortune, amounting to nearly two millions, to his widow, with the exception of a hundred thousand francs to each of his cousins, the two daughters of Madame Dusortois. As to the latter, M. Deblain had left to her only an income of ten thousand francs a year, the capital of which, at her death, was to go to her children.

By a codicil to this will, dated the very year of his marriage, Raymond left legacies to his servants and to several charitable institutions in the town ; he also left to his friend Plemen his pictures and his arms.

This disposal of his effects was obviously the arrangement natural to an honourable man—of a man who had perfect confidence in, and affection for, the woman who bore his name ; but Madame Dusortois would not let it pass. She asserted that her nephew had made this will when unduly influenced by his wife ; and that, very certainly, he must have made another later on, when he found his wife did not seem likely to have children. It was most improbable that he should have thought so little of those who were his natural heirs.

What had become of this second will ? It had doubtless been destroyed. By whom ? Of course, by her who was most interested in its disappearance.

All sensible people, and those who knew how much coolness existed between Madame Dusortois and M. Deblain since his return from America, shrugged their shoulders incredulously at her insinuations ; but these insinuations made their way with many people, because of the jealousy Rhea had excited—a jealousy which

was increased by the great fortune she inherited—and soon these people began saying: "Poor Monsieur Deblain, how his wife despised him, and how she led him by the nose!"

These rumours paved the way for worse accusations; and when it became known that, on the order of Judge Babou, the body of M. Deblain had been exhumed, it caused a great shock to all of the higher order, but many of the citizen class felt no astonishment; a murmur went about that "there must be *something* wrong about it."

Ill-natured people undoubtedly had reason given them for entertaining suspicion, for, less than six days after the exhumation, the most unexpected events succeeded each other.

At first the Public Prosecutor had not given much heed to the anonymous letters he received, accusing Madame Deblain of having destroyed the will. These accusations seemed too vague for him to notice, even prejudiced as he was against her who was attacked; but one day he received a letter written in more precise terms.

According to this missive, "the widow of M. Deblain, who was the mistress of Felix Barthey, after having been the mistress of Dr. Plemen, had poisoned her husband, and her second lover was her accomplice."

"Until justice shall have obtained material

proofs of this crime by all means in its power," wrote the unknown correspondent, "there are sufficient moral proofs. Madame Deblain knew that, by a first will, drawn up shortly after her marriage, her husband had left her all his fortune; and she knew also, when he found she would have no child, he made a fresh will, by which he left the bulk of his property to his own relations—that is, his aunt and cousins—who have no fortune. Now this second will has not been found. Besides this, M. Deblain had insured his life, at his wife's instigation, for a sum of two hundred thousand francs. Finally, the guilty connection of Madame Deblain (whose greatest desire was to live in Paris) with Felix Barthey was a matter of public notoriety; for while that artist was living at the Malle she used constantly to go there, and she frequently stayed all night, whilst her husband was at his town-house.

"It was due entirely to the influence of his wife that M. Deblain offered himself as a candidate for election, instead of Dr. Plemen, who probably did not dare refuse anything to his former mistress, and therefore retired in favour of his friend. If M. Deblain had been elected, his wife would have been able to live altogether in Paris, close to her lover Barthey; and it

was, of course, when she foresaw the defeat of her husband that Madame Deblain determined to rid herself of him who could do nothing to forward her ambitious schemes."

The anonymous accuser then went on :

"In fact, on the very day which preceded the sudden death of M. Deblain, that unhappy man had been speaking at a political meeting ; he returned home convinced of his defeat ; he remained alone with his wife : and, the next morning, Pierre, his valet, found him lifeless in his bed.

"Dr. Magnier, who was called in—for Dr. Plemen had that morning gone to Paris—stated that M. Deblain must have been dead four or five hours at least. His death must have been quite sudden ; yet, notwithstanding the position of the body and the appearance of the face, he seemed to have suffered and struggled. He must, also, have called out ; and yet his wife, whose apartments joined those of her husband, did not go to his aid. She asserts that she heard nothing.

"Again, there is a most extraordinary coincidence—M. Felix Barthey, the intimate friend of the family, the electoral agent of M. Deblain—M. Barthey, who for months past had never quitted Madame Deblain—had disappeared.



Just then he had gone to Paris, and he only returned to Vermel in time to attend the funeral of him whose death would give to him the widow and her fortune."

This abominable accusation, drawn up evidently with the greatest care, went on with farther, but secondary, details; what we have just quoted sufficed to inflame the zeal of the Public Prosecutor. For form's sake, he consulted his chief, M. Lachaussée; the latter eagerly welcomed the prospect of an affair which would attract the attention of everybody to the court of Vermel; and, orders having been given to M. Babou, that magistrate had hastened to get the body of M. Deblain exhumed.

When the remains had been transported to the operating-room of the hospital, the examining judge called in Dr. Plemen, who was usually the examining doctor in criminal cases.

Since the death of Rhea's husband, Eric Plemen had lived in complete seclusion; he never left his house except to attend to his professional duties. Twice only he had left the town to visit the Malle.

The first time he went was six or seven days after M. Deblain's funeral; and Rhea had received him, but only in the room of her sister,



who was just then so ill as to be keeping her bed; the doctor had stayed but a few moments, during which the violent emotion he showed seemed to paralyse him; and he could only utter a few words expressive of his grief for the loss of his friend and his affection for her who had been overwhelmed by so great a calamity.

Then he abruptly withdrew, as if he feared to betray all his feelings in the presence of Madame Gould-Parker.

The second time that Plemen came to the château, a week later, Madame Deblain was alone. Then he threw himself on his knees beside her, and, seizing her hands, said in accents of feverish agitation:

"Rhea, have you already forgotten how deeply I love you? Do not shrink from me! Let us fly from a country which is not worthy of you."

But the young woman answered him at once gently and firmly:

"If I had no great love for my husband, and if I committed the great error of letting you perceive that such was the case, I will none the less respect his memory. I beg you, now, to forget my former foolishness; let time do its work of peace, if not of oblivion. I am resolved to spend all the time given to mourning in complete retirement. At least, I owe so much as

that to the memory of him who was so kind to me."

The doctor had returned to Vermel immediately, in great dejection; but no one was surprised at the change in him; and the deep grief he showed for the loss of his friend only increased the public esteem for his character.

Plemen was living thus, when one morning he received from M. Babou a note, begging him to come immediately to his office at the Palace of Justice. Plemen did not know that the coffin containing the body of M. Deblain was at the hospital, the transport of it having been effected the previous evening with great secrecy.

He immediately went to the office of the examining magistrate, who said to him:

"My dear doctor, justice has need of all your science, but I know not if you will be able to afford us your aid. It is only through deference to you, and from conscientious motives, that, in accordance with the instructions of the Attorney-General, I have ventured to send for you."

"What is the matter in question?" asked the doctor, who was a little surprised at all these preliminaries.

"A post-mortem examination."

"I am always at the disposal of the law, of course."

"Ah, but, this time, the medico-legal examination which we want may be too painful for you."

"I do not understand you!"

"We have every reason to believe that M. Deblain has been the victim of a crime, and——"

Plemen had grown excessively pale, and he clasped convulsively the arms of the chair in which he was seated.

"You see," said the examining judge, "I ought not to have sent for you. Your emotion is quite natural—you were on such intimate terms with the unhappy man. Pray, excuse me! I will send for M. Magnier, or some other doctor."

"No—stay!" said the doctor, making a supreme effort to regain calmness. "M. Deblain the victim of a crime! What makes you suppose such a thing?"

"A quantity of circumstantial evidence."

"Whom do you suspect?"

"No one yet. It is not till I know the cause of M. Deblain's death that I can accuse any one. Now, you see, if I thought first of applying to you, it is because your report can give rise to no

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remarks—unless, indeed, you should decide that M. Deblain died a natural death. In that case only the accusers, remembering your friendliness with the Deblain family, and fearing you might desire to stifle all inquiry—the accusers, I say, might demand a second autopsy, of which, of course, the result would be the same as your own, your great scientific knowledge excluding all possibility of mistake on your part ; whilst, if you find that M. Deblain died a violent death, due to such or such criminal causes, there will be an end of the question. It will then rest with justice to search out the criminal. But I do not insist—I can well understand——”

Plemen, who had been attentively listening to the phrases of M. Babou, here eagerly interrupted him : “ Now, as ever, I am at the service of the State.”

The learned doctor had completely resumed his self-possession.

“ Then you really will not object ? ” said the judge.

“ The task will be a painful one, but I shall fulfil a double duty. I am ready.”

The magistrate bowed, and expressed his admiration at such energy :

“ It was evident that M. Plemen must find such courage in the thought of his affection for

M. Deblain, that he must be most unwilling for the murderers of his friend to escape punishment ;” and, while affectionately pressing Eric’s hand, M. Babou continued :

“ Then I will give immediate instructions to M. Berton ; he will accompany us to the hospital, so that the coffin containing the remains of M. Deblain may be opened in our presence, and that the declaration as to the identity of the body may be drawn up. You will then proceed with your examination, and, of course, you will do the chemical analysis as well as the autopsy ; indeed, we could not find any more skilful toxicologist than you. I place myself at your orders.”

Less than an hour later, in the dissecting-room, in the presence of the chief of police, the coffin was opened, and the corpse, in an advanced stage of decomposition, was placed on the marble table where it was to be examined in the interests of truth.

Plemen went through this terrible operation without speaking a word—without a muscle of his face betraying the grief he must have felt at the sight of the almost unrecognizable remains of him who had been to him as a brother.

It was not till all was ended that he ordered the guardian of this dismal place to arrange the

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apparatus for sprinkling the remains with carbolic acid. Then he told him that he would immediately proceed with his examination.

This done, Messrs. Babou and Berton retired, and the same day, about seven o'clock, in the dusk, the doctor came and shut himself up with the attendant in the operating-room.

Four days later the examining judge received from the doctor a long report, written with admirable clearness, which showed conclusively that the death of Raymond Deblain was due to no organic malady, nor to any of the natural causes certified by Dr. Magnier, but to poisoning by copperas. Chemical analysis had betrayed the presence of this poison in the liver, heart, and lungs of the deceased.

These organs were placed in glass bottles, hermetically sealed, and sent to the court, accompanied by a tiny sheet of copper, labelled, in the handwriting of Dr. Plemen; "Copper extracted from the internal organs of Raymond Deblain."

That a crime had been committed was now a matter of certainty to M. Babou. As to the guilty person, in view of the legal axiom, *Is fecit cui prodest*, it could only be Madame Deblain, probably with the aid and connivance of her lover, the painter, Felix Barthey.

This ambitious but narrow-minded magistrate, who, since he had been made examining judge, had had nothing but commonplace, ordinary affairs to deal with, at last had got his grand crime to try—the sort of thing of which he had long dreamed as a means of rescuing him from the obscurity in which he had hitherto vegetated.

A fashionable lady who was a poisoner! Why, it would be equal to the Lafarge case. It would draw all eyes upon him; and, provided he managed well, left nothing uninvestigated, made as much scandal as possible, and obtained a severe sentence—who knows?—perhaps a capital one, notwithstanding the aversion of juries to send women to the scaffold—his career would be assured. He might get the cross of the Legion of Honour, at least; and, soon after, the appointment of chief justice of a court.

This Barthey was, of course, a Conservative, Legitimist, or Bonapartist, as he had been the electoral agent of M. Deblain. What luck for him to have in his grasp one of these vile creatures, enemies of the Republic, and this impudent foreign woman, who had come and set such a bad example to families in Vermel!

As he made these reflections, M. Babou drew up his rough head, buttoned up his shabby coat,

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and squinted at it, to assure himself beforehand of the good effect the red ribbon would have in his button-hole. Nevertheless, as he was a very prudent man, the examining judge was determined to do nothing on his own authority, whatever might be his desire and his right to do so. With the intention of getting some one to share his responsibility, he went to the office of the Attorney-General, in order to communicate to him the report of Dr. Plemen, and to arrange, in concert with him, about the measures to be taken.

M. Duret was in his office, in company with the chief attorney of the court.

When informed of all the circumstances, both these gentlemen manifested much surprise: they had not expected so prompt nor so decisive a result from the medico-legal examination. However, considering the certainty that this analysis gave them of a crime having been committed, they could not hesitate: they endorsed the suspicions of M. Babou, and were of opinion that instant action must be taken.

With regard to M. Barthey, they were of opinion that it would be wise to wait for the discovery of some circumstances proving his complicity; for it was quite possible that he had been Madame Deblain's lover, and yet that he



might have had nothing to do with helping her in the accomplishment of her crime.

It would soon be seen what position he would take up; meanwhile, he must be watched, so that he might be arrested if he showed any signs of leaving France when he heard of the arrest of his mistress.

Much strengthened by this support, M. Babou returned to his office, and made out a warrant of arrest against Madame Deblain, "conformably to the decisions of the authorities;" this he despatched to the proper quarter, with orders to have it put in execution without delay, on that very day; and immediately afterwards he wrote to the Attorney-General at Paris, in the terms hinted at by MM. Lachaussée and Duret.

The investigating judge had not failed to order M. Berton to proceed to the Malle, and there make a strict search; to close all the rooms and put seals on the doors, and to leave one of his agents in charge. He intended himself to go through the same formalities at the town-house of the Deblains, and to resume the search at the château when the accused should be made prisoner.

Having accomplished all this, M. Babou left the Palace of Justice, with head erect and stern countenance, convinced, like Titus when he had

done a good action, that his day had not been wasted ; and he went home, where his wife, at the first words of the information he hastened to confide to her, kissed him, exclaiming :

“That horrid American ! I instinctively despised her ! I felt she was a wicked wretch, and I was right ! I hope you don't mean to spare her ; mind, Jerome, your advancement in your profession depends now entirely on yourself !”

And this worthy couple sat down to table, thinking of nothing but their own advancement, while the officer who had received the warrant of arrest, however much amazed he might feel, went to the Malle to do his duty.

He took with him his secretary and two subordinates. It was then seven o'clock in the evening.

## CHAPTER IV

## PROFESSIONAL SECRECY

EVER since the morning Madame Deblain had been in a terrible state of nervousness and depression. Her sister could do nothing to cheer her.

It is true that a letter she had received at breakfast-time was of a nature to cause her long and painful emotion. These were its contents :

“MY VERY DEAR FRIEND,—

“I could wish to hide from you the terrible discovery I have just made, but both my duty and my affection compel me to inform you of it, although in writing to you I am violating professional secrecy. But of what account is that beside the feeling I entertain for you ! I entreat of you to command your emotion, as I must tell you that your husband did not die of any natural malady ; but that he owes his death to some accident perfectly unaccountable to me. What

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caused the Attorney-General to entertain this idea I know not ; but the Investigating Judge has been ordered to look into the matter ; he ordered the body of Raymond to be exhumed, and I undertook the terrible task of enlightening justice as to the cause of his sudden death. I have found that Deblain was poisoned with copperas ; how could this have happened ? Perhaps through some neglect on the part of your cook—for the idea of a crime cannot be entertained by any one.

“ You understand, do you not, that if I did not shrink from the terrible examination demanded of me, it was, first, because I was convinced that the suppositions of the authorities, whose medical adviser I have always been, were erroneous : it was because, if I had held back, the dreadful operation would have been performed by some other doctor ; and, finally, if I spoke out the whole truth, it was because, in the event that I should have certified that Raymond’s decease was due only to natural causes, assuredly a second examination would have been ordered, in consequence of the doubts there would have been as to my impartiality ; and the real cause of your husband’s death would have been rendered apparent. Then, think to what suppositions this would have given rise !

"It is impossible to suppose that we shall not find the key to this mystery when we come to the examination of the cooking utensils in your house.

"Let what may happen, immediately after reading this letter, burn it; let not a trace of it remain, and count on the perfect devotion of him who is ever yours,

"ERIC."

After reading this letter to her sister, Rhea, in obedience to Plemen's advice, had destroyed it; but, unable to overcome the agitation which the dreadful revelations of the doctor had caused her, she wandered about the grounds feeling agitated, nervous, and despairing. Pauline had to go twice to tell her that the dinner-bell had rung. Not till then did Madame Deblain take Jenny's arm, and go towards the house.

She had hardly ascended the steps when she heard the sound of wheels on the gravel of the garden-paths.

As she did not expect any visitors, and did not intend to receive any one, she felt some surprise at the sound. She passed through the hall, and, as she reached the glass-door, she saw several persons who had come in by the front entrance.

She stepped back a little, thinking to escape these unexpected visitors, whose presence was so very unwelcome; but one of them, who doubtless had seen her, suddenly opened the door, stepped quickly up to her, and said:

"Excuse me, Madame, but I have business with you."

"With me?" replied Rhea, to whom this man's face was not quite unknown, only in the dim light of the hall she could not see him very distinctly. "Who are you?"

"The Chief Commissioner of Vermel."

"Ah, yes—Monsieur Berton. I did not recognize you; excuse me. What is your business with me?"

"Madame, I have a warrant here for your arrest, which I must put in execution."

The officer, seeming much moved, presented to Madame Deblain a sheet of printed paper which he took from his pocket. As he did so, he uncovered the tricoloured scarf which he wore round his waist.

"A warrant of arrest? I do not understand you!"

"It means, Madame, that I must arrest you, in the name of the law!"

"Arrest *me!*" exclaimed Rhea, turning very pale. "Why? Oh, do they pretend

to say that it is I who poisoned Monsieur Deblain?"

She drew near her sister, who looked petrified with terror.

Amazed at this exclamation, which seemed to him like a confession—for Rhea had not looked at the warrant of arrest, on which, in conformity with the Article 96 of the Code of Criminal Law, the reason for the arrest was set forth—the official only replied by saying:

"Have the goodness to ask your maid for a hat and mantle, for you must come with me."

"Come with you! What—immediately!"

"It is impossible!" said Jenny, clasping Rhea in her arms.

"It must be, Madame!"

"Allow me, at least, to go up to my room to dress."

"Be it so; but I must accompany you. My orders are most strict; pray do not make my duty more painful by resisting."

The secretary and the two officers, who had remained hitherto in the entrance-hall, drew near their chief.

"Very well, Monsieur—very well!" said Madame Deblain, waving back these men. "I shall not resist. To arrest *me*! Ah, I tell you it shall cost those dear to whom I owe

such an indignity! Pauline, give me a hat and cloak."

The maid, who, without daring to utter a word, had witnessed this scene, disappeared to obey the order.

Raymond's widow had regained a little calmness. She said to her sister, who was weeping:

"Be calm, my dear Jenny. I leave it to you to inform my friends of the odious act of which I am the victim. Wait a few days before you telegraph to father; but go yourself to Paris to inform our Ambassador of what is going on. To suspect me, the daughter of Elias Panton, of such a crime!"

While speaking thus the young lady let Pauline put on her hat, and when she had thrown the cloak over her shoulders, she said to the commissioner of police, in a firm voice:

"I am ready, sir; let us go!"

The officer seemed more embarrassed than his prisoner, and in less haste to depart. Therefore Rhea said to him:

"Well, sir, what are you waiting for?"

"Pardon me, Madame," said M. Berton, "but before leaving the house I must make a search in your presence, and place seals on such of the rooms and pieces of furniture as I have not time to examine."



"Do it."

"Have the goodness to accompany me."

"Where will you begin?"

"In your private apartments."

Madame Deblain took her sister's arm, and went upstairs.

The commissioner, his secretary, and one of the officers followed her.

Rhea's apartments consisted of a boudoir, a bedroom, and a large dressing-room opening into a bath-room. All the rooms were furnished with great splendour.

"These are my rooms, Monsieur," said she, as she entered the first of them.

The official rapidly examined it. There was nothing in it but chairs, a piano, cabinets filled with artistic trifles, flower-stands, and a large table, on which was a writing-desk inlaid with silver, writing materials, and a blotting-book. Not a single thing which would lock.

After having looked through the blotting-book, and assured himself that it contained nothing but insignificant papers, M. Berton begged Madame Deblain to go on to the bedroom.

Rhea obeyed, but could not repress a movement of disgust at this kind of profanation of her private rooms.

"Oh, this is shameful!" said she, squeezing her sister's hand.

The furniture in this room was in the Louis XVI. style—old mahogany, with ornamentation of gilded brass. The heavy hangings of the bed, the window-curtains, and the *portières* had been manufactured at Lyons from eighteenth-century models. The thick carpets came from Smyrna. It was a beautiful room—the room of a lady of fashion; but M. Berton did not stop to admire any of these things. He walked straight up to a splendid Italian cabinet, of the Renaissance period, inlaid with ivory, and with drawers and compartments of all kinds.

On seeing the commissioner of police open this piece of furniture, Madame Deblain stepped eagerly up to him, and said:

"There is nothing there, Monsieur, but family papers—letters from my father and my friends. Nobody has any right to read them."

"I shall not presume to do so, Madame; but if you do not authorize me to assure myself of the degree of importance that may attach to these letters regarding the search I am compelled to make, I must seal them up and take them to the investigating judge, who will examine them in your presence."

While thus replying, politely but firmly, the officer was putting together the papers which he found in the various compartments of the cabinet. The two young women followed his movements with anxious eyes.

Suddenly Jenny, stifling a scream, whispered to her sister :

"Oh, *his* letters, *his* letters !"

M. Berton had just taken, from one of the drawers of the cabinet, a packet of letters tied up with gold thread.

"Be quiet," replied Madame Deblain rapidly. "You know the letters have neither name nor address."

"Can you give me a box, Madame, in which I can put all these papers?" asked the commissioner of police.

"Yes, here is one, Monsieur."

Rhea had emptied out on a table a jewel-box, from which escaped a fortune in the form of rings, bracelets, and necklaces ; and offered it to the officer.

He placed in it all the letters, locked it, gave the key to his prisoner, and said :

"This box will never be opened but in your presence, Madame ; of that I assure you. Now let us continue the search."

He went into the dressing-room, but only to

order his secretary, who had glanced at all the bottles on the marble shelves, to seal up the doors of that room. Then, begging Madame Deblain to follow him, he went downstairs.

Half an hour later, after having placed seals on the apartments which had been M. Deblain's—and, to the amazement of Madame Gould-Parker, on the room occupied by Felix Barthey when he came to the Malle—M. Berton placed his prisoner in the carriage, got into it himself, with his secretary, after having said to the driver, "You know where to go."

The commissioner left one of his agents in charge at the château; the other had mounted the box. The carriage drove away in the direction of Vermel, it being now completely dark.

The servants, who all loved their mistress, were deeply grieved; they could not comprehend what had taken place. When Pauline informed them of the probable cause of Madame Deblain's arrest, they uttered loud exclamations of anger and indignation.

"Ah, if I had known what those people had come here for," said the old lodgekeeper Fernier, "I would have crushed them between the gates rather than let them pass! Our good, kind mistress a poisoner! What fools they must be!"

As to Jenny, she had immediately given

orders to have a carriage got ready for her. She meant to go into Vermel, see M. Plemen, and telegraph to M. Barthey that she would start by the first train for Paris, where she asked him to meet her at the station.

Three-quarters of an hour later the carriage was at the door of the learned doctor. He immediately received Madame Gould-Parker.

"Rhea has just been arrested," said she to him, on entering the study into which the servant had shown her.

The doctor, who was coming towards Jenny, stopped abruptly, and leant against a chair.

"Madame Deblain arrested! For what reason?"

"I do not know, but I *think*—for, as you may suppose, I feel half mad; I think that they accuse her of poisoning her husband!"

Eric uttered a cry of horror, then, dropping into a chair, he said:

"And it is my doing, my doing!"

"Why, that is true," said Jenny, approaching the doctor; "it is you who testified that my brother-in-law—for I read your letter—oh, it is dreadful! What shall we do—O Heaven! what *shall* we do?"

Plemen rose, with haggard eyes, saying:

"And my letter—what has become of my letter?"

"Rhea burnt it."

"Wait here till I return; I will go and see the public prosecutor."

"I have not told you all: Monsieur Berton made a search at the Malle, and he carried off all the papers he found in my sister's apartments, after having placed seals on the apartments of Monsieur Deblain and on the room generally used by Monsieur Barthey."

"On Barthey's room? What was the meaning of that?"

"I know not."

"Oh, I must find out what all this means."

"I want to telegraph to Paris, to tell Monsieur Barthey I am coming. I shall take the night train, so that I may get to our Ambassador early to-morrow morning."

"You have plenty of time; the train does not pass Vermel till one o'clock, and now it is hardly nine. Write out your telegram; I will send it off by one of my servants."

He took Madame Gould-Parker to his desk, and she there wrote out the following telegram:

"Felix Barthey, 46 Rue d'Offémont, Paris. Dreadful things have happened. Meet me at the station at 5 A.M.—JENNY."

"That will do," said the doctor, taking the despatch and ringing; "Bernard will take it himself."

And as his valet had answered the bell, he gave him the telegram, ordering him to get it sent off immediately.

"As for us, Madame, we must have courage, and not lose our heads. In all this, there is nothing but some absurd mistake. Rely upon me. I know where I can find Monsieur Duret."

Just then the door of the room opened to let in Pauline, who said:

"Madame, the police have taken possession of the town-house! Just now, as I was going in, I saw Monsieur Babou and the commissioner of police, the one who was at the château."

"Monsieur Babou, the investigating judge?" asked Plemen. "Ah, yes; that is his business; it is he I must see first."

He rushed out of his study to go to Deblain's house, where the door was immediately opened to him.

"Where are the gentlemen?" he asked the porter, who, with agitated countenance, was standing at the door of his lodge.

"Upstairs," replied the good man; "upstairs, with Nicholas. What a dreadful affair!"

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servants Madame Deblain had had at the town-house since the death of her husband. Pierre, M. Deblain's valet, had been dismissed with a handsome present.

Plemen ran up the stairs, and immediately found him he was seeking. Standing in the smoking-room, which was next to M. Deblain's bedroom, the investigating judge was asking Nicholas for information about the rooms.

"Excuse me, Monsieur Babou; I should like a word with you," said Eric.

"You, doctor!" said the magistrate, surprised at his appearance, and allowing himself to be drawn away; "have you heard anything fresh?"

"I know of nothing but the arrest of Madame Deblain," replied the doctor; "I have just been informed of it, and of your being here; and I have come to warn you against making some dreadful blunder."

"Blunder! I do not understand you?"

"I am told that you accuse Madame Deblain of having poisoned her husband."

"Oh, I do not *accuse* her yet."

"Then, why——"

"Allow me to say that you, yourself, stated that Monsieur Deblain had died from the effects of poison."



"That is true, but I said nothing about a crime having been committed!"

"That is a point which a trial alone can decide."

"Pray consider that I was the friend of the unfortunate Deblain—that I am still the friend of his widow. You suspected the unhappy woman, and you induced me to undertake—— You are forcing me to play a dreadful part! I tell you that if I had known——"

"Pray remember that I proposed to you to leave the examination to your *confrère*, Monsieur Magnier."

"That is true! But still, how dreadful it all is! Come, Monsieur Babou, do not go any further in this affair; wait a little while. Madame Deblain is not guilty: she cannot be!"

"How do you know? You have done your duty, doctor, and now you must, really, let me do mine."

And as the judge, after having said these words in a very dry manner, was about to rejoin his coadjutors, Plemen caught him by the arm, saying:

"A moment more, I entreat you! Madame Deblain is arrested. Where is she?"

"In the House of Detention."

"At the Carmelite prison?"

"Of course."

"How horrible! Then on a mere suspicion, this poor woman, accustomed to every comfort and every luxury, is to be subjected to prison rules!"

"The law makes no distinction of persons. If I find nothing to confirm my suspicions, I shall set Madame Deblain at liberty; in the contrary case, she will have to undergo the common lot. I can see no reason for treating her with more consideration than any other person."

"I fear, on the contrary, that you may have some reason for treating her with particular severity."

"Doctor, I cannot, as a magistrate, permit such insinuations. Allow me——"

Saying this with great dignity, M. Babou suddenly quitted Plemen, who, looking scornfully after him, descended the stairs, murmuring:

"And it is I who have betrayed her into their hands—I, who would have given my life for her! How can they suppose her guilty? Rhea in prison!"

He returned home, and hastened to Madame Gould-Parker, after having given the order for his carriage to be got ready.

"I have just seen Monsieur Babou," said he to Jenny, "but I could do nothing with him. I am afraid he is only too delighted to be able to seize the opportunity of humiliating such a woman as Madame Deblain. Monsieur Babou is not a bad man, but he is vain and foolish. Besides, I am sure he is not acting entirely on his own authority; he is too prudent for that. He has had instructions from his superiors, or, at least, he is acting with their consent. It is obvious that when he has once examined your sister, he will have to set her free; therefore, we can do nothing this evening except to make sure that Madame Deblain wants for nothing in the prison. I am on intimate terms with the Governor of the Carmelite prison, so I will go and see him immediately. I am sure he will take care that your sister is treated with all possible consideration. But what will you do?"

"I will remain here till midnight," said Madame Gould-Parker. "You may imagine I do not wish to go to my sister's house, where I should meet all those people. I shall be in Paris by five to-morrow morning. I shall find Monsieur Barthey waiting for me at the station; and, in the course of the morning, I will see our Ambassador. He is a friend of my husband, and I shall tell him all. I have no doubt he

will immediately demand an interview with your chief justice. Think of their daring to accuse Rhea of being a murderess?"

"Then good-by, for a little while."

"I shall wait till you come back."

The Carmelite prison was close by the Palace of Justice. It was so named because it had been constructed on land where, previous to the decrees of the 18th of August 1792, a Carmelite convent had stood. The law courts and the prison being close together, at least spared unfortunate prisoners the pain of being driven about in the hideous prison van. This prison was at once a House of Detention and a place where culprits underwent their punishment when they had received sentences of less than three months. One division of it, completely separated from the rest, was used for women, and was under the care of certain Sisters of the order of "Mary and Joseph." This, of course, was before the question of secularization arose.

All magistrates and governors of prisons well know what confidence they can place in nuns, and that, however humane these holy women may be in the administration of their painful duties, they are utterly beyond the reach of bribery. The prisoners find them always

gentle and compassionate, but silent and incorruptible. There never was an instance known of one failing in her duty. These duties are, for the Sisters serving in prisons, an Act of Faith. We know whether secular attendants are actuated by the same feelings!

The Governor of the Carmelite prison, M. Crosnier, had been an officer in the army. He was an excellent man, and had long held his present position. Changes of administration not having affected him, he had been there for twelve years, and knew everybody in Vermel. Consequently, he had felt perfectly amazed when Madame Deblain was brought to him, with orders from M. Babou that she should be kept in solitary confinement. These orders he had strictly obeyed, but still in as humane a manner as possible; and he had hardly returned to his office, after having himself looked after the comfort of his new prisoner, when Plemen, who was an old acquaintance, was announced.

M. Crosnier went forward to meet him, saying:

"My dear doctor, I can imagine what is the object of your visit. You were on intimate terms with the Deblains; what does all this mean? Certain rumours had reached me, but

I never expected to see the widow of your friend arrested."

"This arrest has astonished me no less than it has you," replied Eric; "and to-morrow the whole town will be ringing with the scandal. Monsieur Babou, whom I have just seen, suspects Madame Deblain of having poisoned her husband."

"Did he really die of poison?"

"Yes, I am certain he did, because I myself had the misfortune to perform the post-mortem examination, never imagining what would be its consequences. But because Deblain died of poison, is that any reason for accusing his wife of a crime? Unless he committed suicide, his death must have been caused by some misadventure on the part of a servant. The examination will, of course, clear up the mystery; but, meanwhile, there is poor Madame Deblain imprisoned on suspicion, and she may be in the House of Detention for a long time. How will she ever endure the moral and physical tortures consequent on such a situation?"

"So far as the material side of existence is concerned, you and the rest of her friends need have no uneasiness. Madame Deblain shall be treated here with all the indulgence and all the consideration my duty will allow me to show to

her. I have taken care she should not be subjected to any of the insulting precautions which are necessary in some cases. I have spared her the humiliation of being searched; and I have had her placed in a room of the infirmary which, fortunately, was vacant, and where she will wait for nothing."

"For that I thank you most sincerely."

"Besides this, Madame Deblain can order her own meals, and she may send for any clothing she needs; also I have specially commended her to the care of Sister Saint-Anne, who is an intelligent and well-educated woman. This Sister will sleep in an adjoining room, so as to be at hand if Madame Deblain should call; and none of my inspectors, except at the regular hours, will be allowed to enter her room. Surely her detention cannot last very long."

"I cannot tell you how grateful I am for all this kindness."

"I am doing nothing but my duty."

"In what state of mind did you leave Madame Deblain?"

"She seemed to feel more insulted and indignant than alarmed or grieved. When I left her a few moments ago, with Sister Saint-Anne, she was perfectly calm."

"Well, it is fortunate for my poor friend that



she has fallen into the hands of such a man as you! She is a very energetic young woman, and will not allow herself to be beaten down. Again, accept my thanks, Monsieur Crosnier, and, if your duty allow you to do so, let Madame Deblain know that her friends will never desert her."

After pressing in his burning hand that of the Governor, Dr. Plemen took leave of him, and hastened back to Madame Gould-Parker.

Just as his carriage was stopping at his door, he saw Babou and his subordinates leaving the Deblains' house.

After searching the rooms of the first story—a search which had led to no interesting result—M. Babou had contented himself with placing seals on the doors of these apartments, as well as on the doors and windows of the kitchen and dining-room.

He made up his mind to have a more complete search, after he had interrogated Madame Deblain, and this interrogation must legally be made within the twenty-four hours.

At one o'clock in the morning, Jenny, a little reassured concerning the fate of her sister, took the mail-train for Paris. A few moments later, Plemen, who had gone with her to the station, returned home, and being alone, and no longer



fearing to betray himself, he sank into a chair, crying in a stifled voice :

"And it is I who am the cause of all this misery ! Ah, I swear they shall not condemn her, though, to save her, I should sacrifice my own life ! But if I have to take poison, they will not have a Dr. Plemen at hand to find it out !"

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## CHAPTER V

### THE HOUSE OF DETENTION

IF the face of Madame Deblain expressed more indignation than grief, at the moment when she was delivered into the hands of the Governor of the prison, it was because she had been thinking seriously during the time the carriage took to get from the Malle to Vermel.

At first, when struck down by the blow of the horrible accusation, and deeply humiliated at the effect her arrest would produce in that town where she had held her head so high, Rhea had sunk back in the carriage, opposite to the two men, who at least respected her situation by keeping silent ; and perhaps she half believed that she was in a horrid dream ; but soon her energetic nature resumed its sway.

She then said to herself that she must assume an impenetrable mask ; that a woman in her position must not beg for pity from anybody at sight of her despair ; and she so quickly armed

herself with this resolution, that, when the prison-gates opened to admit the carriage, she did not even start. The chief of police did not feel her hand tremble when it rested on his arm as she got out of the carriage; and it was with a calm voice that, a few moments later, she answered the questions addressed to her by M. Crosnier concerning her identity, previous to making the entries in his register. It was also with a firm step that the unhappy girl walked to the little room which was to be her cell; and with a gracious movement of her head she accepted the guardianship of Sister Saint-Anne, and saluted the Governor when he withdrew with the nun.

But when, having heard the door of her prison close, she saw herself alone, in this room with its whitewashed walls, with no furniture but a little iron bedstead and two chairs, lighted by one gas-jet covered with a thick glass, and which could be extinguished from the outside, all her instincts revolted against it, and she could not restrain a cry, which was caused as much by disgust as by terror at her loneliness.

At this cry, Sister Saint-Anne, who had been waiting outside, opened the wicket in the door and asked her if she had need of anything; but Madame Deblain, again summoning up all her

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energy, answered No; and she lay down, dressed as she was, on the wretched bed, in order to stifle her sobs.

She had been lying there more than an hour, trying to reduce her ideas to order, asking herself why she had been arrested, for she could not imagine she was suspected of a crime. Her exclamation, "Do they suppose it was I who poisoned Monsieur Deblain!" when the chief of police presented himself before her at the Malle, had been only a cry of indignation. She did not know that on the warrant for her arrest the motive for that arrest was stated; she had not read it. She was lying there, we say, thinking vaguely of her situation, feeling as if her reason were deserting her, her head buried in her crossed arms, when she felt herself lightly touched on the shoulder, while a gentle voice was saying:

"Take courage, Madame!"

It was the nun, who had entered without making any noise. Sister Saint-Anne was a woman of about fifty, in whose emaciated face it was easy to read an existence of self-sacrifice and goodness.

"Ah, it is you," exclaimed the prisoner; "oh, thank you for coming; I am afraid!"

"Do not let yourself be cast down," said the

kind Sister. "You must be extremely fatigued, so undress and go to bed. You may do so without fear; I prepared the bed for you, and I will not let you want for anything. God will not let His creatures be given over to despair! Pray to Him, and you will be comforted."

Without answering one word, Rhea fixed on the Sister her great eyes, full of tears.

"Shall we pray to Him together?" said the Sister.

"I am a Protestant," murmured Rhea.

"It is not for me to judge you. Is not our God the same God; full of mercy, inclining His ear always to those who implore Him. Let us pray!"

The nun took Rhea's hand, and they knelt together.

A few moments after, the young widow, calm and grateful, arose, and, helped by her guardian, lay down in her bed, to spend her first night in prison. But, alas! the hours passed without bringing her sleep.

As soon as she found herself again alone, she closed her eyes, hoping for sleep, but in vain. The slightest events of this dreadful day were haunting her so persistently that she could not forget them for a moment. She asked herself what had become of her sister; what her friends

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would think ; she thought of the despair of her father and mother when they should hear of her arrest ; she wondered what Dr. Plemen would do. Would they all abandon her to her despair ? Of what was she accused ? Could it be of killing her husband ? Yes, it must be that crime they attributed to her, since M. Deblain had died of the effects of poison. He had been poisoned ! But how—by whom ? He had no enemies ; it must have been an accident. But if they should not be able to discover the cause of his sudden death, how should she defend herself ? Who had dared to suspect her ? Could it be Madame Dusortois ? She well knew that Raymond's aunt had never liked her ; but there was a wide difference between mere dislike and believing her capable of such a monstrous crime ! Could it be possible that the large fortune she had inherited had increased all the mean jealousy of which she had been the object ever since her arrival at Vermel ? Ah, that fortune ! She would not keep a penny of it ! Should she not one day be much richer than M. Deblain had ever been ? Did not everybody know that ?

She foresaw that she would be reproached with her extravagance, her luxuries, her splendid parties, to which all Vermel had desired to be invited ; and this reminded her of her triumphs,

her adorers, her pleasures, and her husband's kindness to her.

It was true that Raymond had died in the next room to hers; he must have cried aloud—called for help! Would any one ever believe that she had heard nothing—that she could hear nothing? What answer could she make? Ah, it was horrible; she was lost!

The interminable hours passed thus, whether she were waking or sleeping, worn out with fatigue. If she were awake, the reality was before her, terrible, inexorable; if she slumbered, she was oppressed with nightmare terrors.

However, towards morning she fell asleep, but awoke with a cry of horror, when, on opening her eyes, she saw herself in this wretched room.

Fortunately, the Sister came in immediately. After having calmed and reassured her, the good nun helped her to dress, and, about ten o'clock, induced her to take some food; then she undertook to get from the Mall or the town-house whatever was necessary for Madame Deblain.

These details of material life took off Rhea's attention a little from the terrors of her situation; and, yielding to the advice of her consoler, she was regaining a little courage, when the Governor entered her room, and said to her :

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"Madame, the investigating judge has sent me the order to bring you before him."

"I am glad of it! Anything is better than this uncertainty, which is driving me mad!"

She quickly dressed herself and followed M. Crosnier to the office. There the Governor placed her in the charge of the policeman, who was waiting, and gave strict injunctions to the man to treat her with all respect.

A few moments later, after passing through the corridor which led from the prison to the Palace of Justice, Madame Deblain arrived at a small vestibule which formed the ante-chamber of M. Babou's office.

In this ante-chamber were half a dozen common-looking people, sitting about on forms—prisoners, doubtless—who regarded her with a fixed and mocking stare. Rhea hesitated about going among them, and, the policeman observing this, said:

"Would you rather stay out here, Madame?"

"Oh, yes, thank you!"

The unhappy creature leaned against the balustrade of the stone staircase, whilst her guardian walked up and down stamping his heels on the pavement.

Raymond's widow waited thus nearly an hour, with her veil over her face; and she



knew that this was a humiliation inflicted on her by M. Babou. At last a voice called :

"The woman Deblain!"

At this insolent manner of speaking of her, Rhea felt the colour rise to her very forehead ; nevertheless, she advanced with a firm step, and entered the office of the investigating judge. The policeman remained outside, and the door of the office was instantly closed. Rhea was in the presence of him who held her fate in his hands.

Leaning back in his armchair, his legs crossed, and twirling his watch-chain with his dirty fingers, the magistrate, with sneering face, and hardly deigning to incline his head to this woman whom he had always seen treated with the utmost respect, said :

"You may sit down. Take off your veil."

Rhea obeyed, and took a seat, feeling extremely angry and disgusted. She foresaw that this man was not only her judge, but her enemy.

When his prisoner was seated and had taken off her veil, M. Babou stared at her for several seconds, as if to impress upon her the power of his false and malignant gaze ; but the young woman not seeming disturbed by it, he at last said :

"Your name, Christian names, and age?"

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"I was born in Philadelphia, and I am twenty-two years old," she answered dryly. "As to my name, you must be well aware what that is, since it is you who had me arrested. I desire to know what were your reasons for so doing."

"You are here to answer questions, not to ask them. I warn you that my clerk will take down your lightest word."

"My name is Marie Rhea Panton."

"When did you become Madame Deblain?"

"Nearly three years ago, during a visit of Monsieur Deblain's at my father's house in Philadelphia."

"Monsieur Deblain fell into a trap you laid for him, in concert with your uncle, a certain clergyman named Jonathan Thompson?"

"I do not know what you mean. Monsieur Deblain married me because he loved me. He never was the least entrapped! People who tell such tales are fools and slanderers!"

"I must insist that you moderate your tone! Your answer does not surprise me. Of course, you are very unwilling to have the circumstances attending your marriage known—a marriage performed in the garden of an inn, and which had to be again solemnized at the French Embassy to make it legal! It is perfectly obvious that Monsieur Deblain was

entrapped! Afterwards, he made the best of it, and behaved like a gallant gentleman. What sort of position does your father hold?"

"My father is a great deal richer than any merchant in Vermel! I and my sister, the wife of Colonel Gould-Parker, military attaché to the American Embassy, each had a fortune of half a million of francs."

"You have always shown a great desire to live in Paris, and it was with that view that you drove your husband to become a Parliamentary candidate. Monsieur Deblain yielded to that whim, as he had yielded to all your other whims—weakly yielded, but that weakness cost him dear! It was when you found out he was certain to be defeated that you thought of ridding yourself of him who had failed to realize your dream of ambition and liberty!"

"Then you accuse me of having murdered my husband?"

"That is the crime with which you are charged. You yourself admitted your guilt when you exclaimed, on seeing Monsieur Berton at the Malle, 'Do you believe it was I who poisoned Monsieur Deblain?' Now, as you had not read the warrant of arrest, how could you know what had caused your husband's death?"

At this question Rhea hung down her head. Not daring to speak of the letter which the doctor had written her, she saw at once that these words of hers were fatal.

"Ah, you cannot answer that!" said M. Babou in sneering tones.

"My saying those words was a mere chance!"

"Ah, yes, and *mere chance* caused you to tell the truth. The jury will quite appreciate it. Doubtless we shall find *there* plenty of other proofs." Saying this, the magistrate tapped with his clumsy fingers on the lid of the box in which, the day before, M. Berton had placed the papers seized at the Malle in Madame Deblain's bedroom.

"That box contains only private letters," said Rhea. "Monsieur Berton assured me that it would never be opened but in my presence and with my permission."

"That is quite right; but if you do not authorize me to open it, I shall refer the matter to those who can, and justice will take its course. You will do well to complete your involuntary confessions, and name your accomplice."

"My accomplice!"

"Yes, your accomplice — Monsieur Felix Barthey."

"Monsieur Felix Barthey! First I would ask, how I can have an *accomplice* when I have done no wrong? And then, why Monsieur Barthey?"

"I am fully informed as to what your conduct has been since your arrival at Vermel. Your husband was weak—blind; you cared nothing for him, and you began by making of Dr. Plemen your slave. Then came Monsieur Barthey, whose residence was in Paris—Paris, where you, too, were so desirous of living——"

"Ah, Monsieur, I was unwilling to believe that you could lend yourself to such an infamous assertion! I did not think there existed in the world a country where the law would allow a man to insult a woman, whatever might be his functions!"

Madame Deblain had risen, her eyes flashing with indignation.

At this movement M. Babou was for a moment taken aback, and his clerk, in astonishment, ceased to write.

But he immediately resumed his insolent tone, saying:

"All this play-acting does not surprise me; I quite expected it. Yes, you wanted to get to Paris to be near Monsieur Barthey, your lover!"

"Enough, sir, enough! I am not quite so much a stranger to the laws of France as you imagine. I know that torture was abolished long ago. Then by what right do you inflict the torture on me of questioning me as you are now doing?"

"Madame!"

"I swear to you, sir, that these are the very last words I ever will speak to you. Henceforward you will question me in vain; I will not answer you. The American Ambassador is perhaps at this moment in consultation with the Minister of Justice concerning my affairs. A day will come when you will have to give an account of your conduct to a defenceless woman, whom you have a right to arraign, since you think her guilty, but whom it was your duty to *protect* from insult. It is only before my judges that I will explain myself, or that any one shall speak for me. To you, never another word! Never!"

Rhea had said all this with such dignity, resolution was so energetically expressed in her face, that M. Babou could not find anything to say; not that he believed, in his narrow, vain mind that he was at all in the wrong, but simply because he did not in the least expect any such revolt on her part.

"Ah, you will not answer me," he at last said, in his nasal tones. "Well; we shall see. Solitary confinement has brought down as haughty spirits as yours. Am I to go on with my investigation?"

Madame Deblain only shook her head.

"Be it so," said he; and, addressing his clerk, he said:

"Make the prisoner sign the declaration."

Rhea approached the table, and, after having glanced at the papers the clerk pushed towards her, she rapidly wrote at the bottom of one of the sheets the following words:

"When the interrogatory sentences and my replies are correctly reported, I will sign them."

M. Babou rose in a fury, exclaiming:

"I forbid you to quit this room! Ah, you *will* not speak!"

He began writing, and, when he had finished, he ordered his clerk to call the policeman who had brought Madame Deblain.

The man entered immediately.

"Take this woman back to the prison," said he, "and give this letter to Monsieur Crosnier. Ah! so you will not speak to me!"

Rhea affected not to hear this menacing phrase, and went out with her veil down.

## CHAPTER VI

ON THE INFLUENCE, AS YET UNDISCOVERED, OF  
VERONESE GREEN ON THE HONOUR  
OF AN ARTIST

IF M. Babou had only allowed himself to be what he really was—that is, an honest man and a magistrate incapable of intentionally violating professional honour—it is certain that he must have been touched by the emotion of Madame Deblain. Unfortunately, he was the son of poor parents; had been a hard-working student, having attained to every step in his career by dint of hard work alone; he had no means but the absurdly small pay given in France to those appointed to administer justice; and being naturally of an envious disposition, he cherished the blind hatred of all *self-made* men for those born in a superior position. Besides this, although he was learned in the law, he was not a man of much intelligence, and was, withal, jealous of his authority, very obstinate, and extremely ambitious.



As an ordinary magistrate, he had been in his right place; but, as an investigating judge, he was wanting in delicacy, insight, and good breeding; consequently, he saw nothing in Madame Deblain's indignation but a comedy frequently played by prisoners; nothing in her words but an outrage against his dignity; and nothing in her vow that she would never answer him, but a vain boast which would not hold out long against the solitude of imprisonment.

It was with this conviction that he immediately wrote to the Governor to renew the order to keep Madame Deblain in the strictest seclusion.

Nevertheless, his conscience being a little troubled, M. Babou thought it best to go to the chief attorney of his court, and inform him of all that had taken place between him and Madame Deblain.

"Oh, the tone this woman takes is quite what we might have expected," replied M. Lachaussée; "she is capable of any amount of impudence. That is all the more reason why you should push on your examination, whether she refuse to speak or not. Do not lose any time about making the strictest search in her house. If you find anything new, telegraph to me in Paris, for I am called there by the Keeper

of the Seals, most probably in consequence of a visit he has had from the American Ambassador, who has been 'appealed to by Madame Gould-Parker. I shall start this evening for Paris, and shall avail myself of the opportunity to see that proper measures are taken with regard to Felix Barthey, of whose complicity I have not the least doubt."

Feeling quite assured by this accordance of ideas between his chief and himself, M. Babou informed M. Crosnier that he would send for Madame Deblain the next morning about ten o'clock, to be present at the search that he intended to make in her presence at the Malle; but Rhea told the Governor that they would have to take her by force, as she would refuse to accompany the investigating judge; therefore M. Babou determined to go to the château without her.

He took with him his clerk, a police officer, and a locksmith, of whose services he supposed he would have need.

On arriving at the Malle he had the gates opened "in the name of the law," for the honest gatekeeper of the château pretended to be deaf, and was in no hurry to open to the law's myrmidons. Babou first visited the apartments of Madame Deblain, but nothing there appear-

ing to him worth a long examination, he went on to M. Barthey's room, and searched it carefully.

It was a large room, prettily decorated with flowered cretonne. It had a wide brass bedstead, and furniture of maple, with a glass-doored wardrobe, a bookcase containing mostly works on fishing and sport, and a few novels; also, there was a table strewn with pamphlets and sketches—an ideal guest-chamber for a country house, always ready to receive a friend. This bedroom had adjoining it a dressing-room, where the investigating judge observed on one of the chairs a white suit, which must have been the artist's working dress, as it was stained here and there with various colours.

"Evidently," thought M. Babou, "Monsieur Barthey made himself quite at home."

But nothing of any interest turned up, from the magistrate's point of view—nothing in the drawers of the toilet-table, nothing anywhere; and M. Babou was about to withdraw, feeling rather disconcerted at the uselessness of his search, when, as he was passing through the bedroom, the idea occurred to him to lift up the cover there was on the large table.

He then perceived that this table had a wide drawer. As it was locked, he ordered the lock-

smith to open it. It was not opened without some difficulty, they found, as it was a safety lock. However, they at last succeeded, and M. Babou hastened to search the drawer, at the back of which he found, under some letters and bills, which he tied up, a small round metal box, on the lid of which was a half-torn label, where might still be read "Veronese Green."

"Veronese Green," spelt out the magistrate, who was as ignorant as a goose of everything appertaining to art; "what can that be?"

He had opened the box; it was about half full of extremely fine green powder.

"Perhaps he uses that in his work for making some special colour," he thought. "However, we must see about it—who knows! who knows!"

He added the box to the various papers he had found in the drawer, and, as this discovery reminded him that Barthey was an artist, he asked the gatekeeper where M. Barthey usually worked.

Being compelled to obey him, old Ternier took his unwelcome guests across the grounds to the back of the theatre, into a room which had served at once as painting-room and green-room.

It was a large room, elegantly furnished, but

showing signs of the double purpose it served. Against the walls stood three or four wardrobes with glass doors, marble-topped tables, Japanese screens, and wide, low sofas; on the floor were thick carpets, on the walls splendid hangings; then there were cabinets and consoles laden with artistic objects; an immense aviary, where lived, in an atmosphere as warm as their native forests, a number of birds; and, finally, there were two or three easels, on which stood pictures covered with light cloths, to keep them from the dust.

M. Babou hastened to remove these cloths, and he was immediately struck by one of the pictures.

It was a portrait of Madame Deblain, of life-size. The head was quite finished, and was a perfect likeness, but the painter seemed to have changed his mind as to the colour of the dress; for, notwithstanding that it was nearly obliterated, it was easy to see that the gown had been at first red, and that then the artist had quitted his work. Why?

M. Babou thought that it was doubtless the death of M. Deblain which had interrupted the work, and after having opened and rummaged about among the furniture without discovering anything interesting, he made up his mind to

quit the Malle without giving it any farther search. It was then three o'clock in the afternoon. Less than an hour later M. Babou entered the office of the Attorney-General, and showing him the little box, said :

"I think now Madame Deblain will be less arrogant."

"What is this?" asked M. Duret, taking a little of the powder up in his fingers.

"Simply arsenite of copper, as Monsieur Planat—a first-rate chemist, even according to Dr. Plemen—found without a moment's hesitation. Arsenite of copper—a deadly poison! And I found it stowed away in a drawer in Monsieur Barthey's room at the Malle! You understand?"

"It is clear enough. What do you mean to do?"

"I shall issue a warrant of arrest against Felix Barthey, and I beg of you to take all the necessary measures to that end."

"All my measures are taken; you have my complete approval."

"I will make out a warrant of arrest, which shall be served on him to-morrow morning."

Just as M. Babou was saying these words, one of M. Duret's clerks opened the door of the room and gave his chief the card of a

visitor, who asked to see the magistrate on urgent business.

"Monsieur Felix Barthey!" said he, and after glancing at the card he handed it to M. Babou.

"Well," said the latter, "this is audacity!"

"No; on the contrary, it is quite natural. Monsieur Barthey knows nothing of your suspicions, and is aware that Madame Deblain is arrested; he could, therefore, do no less than come here. If he showed no kind of interest in the fate of his mistress, he would bring suspicion on himself."

"You are right. Well, let him come in, and then you just keep him here a few minutes."

"After that I will send him to you."

"Oh, there will be no need!"

M. Babou emphasized this last speech with one of his spiteful glances, and hurried away to his own office.

In the entrance-hall he passed the artist, but so quickly that Felix did not recognize him. Besides, just then the attendant announced to him that the Attorney-General had given orders to admit him.

As soon as he was in the presence of M. Duret, who bowed as he offered him a chair, M. Barthey said to him:

"Monsieur, I was informed in Paris this morning, by Madame Gould-Parker, of the arrest of Madame Deblain, and I have come to ask you for such explanations as you can afford me concerning this extraordinary event. You can imagine what are the feelings of all the friends of that charming lady. May I ask of what crime she is accused?"

The magistrate dryly replied: "Well, Monsieur, she is accused of poisoning her husband."

"Oh, I cannot have heard aright! Madame Deblain a poisoner!"

"An investigation has been commenced, and I may tell you that the result of the search made at the town and country houses of the Deblains is overwhelming both for her and her accomplice."

"Her accomplice! You say Madame Deblain killed her husband, and that she had an accomplice! Who, then, is that accomplice?"

"On that point I must be silent. The affair is in the hands of the investigating judge. If you like to see him, perhaps he will tell you more."

"I hope he will, so I beg your permission to leave you."

"Do so, Monsieur."

The artist bowed, and hastened out to see



M. Babou ; but just as he was approaching the magistrate's office he found himself face to face with a police officer, who said :

"Are you Monsieur Felix Barthéy?"

"Yes," he replied.

"Then, Monsieur, in the name of the law, I arrest you! Here is the warrant which I have to execute against you."

"Indeed! Let me see it. Ah, perhaps it is I who am the accomplice!"

He took the paper from the man's hand, and when he had read it he gave it back to him, saying: "Yes, I see; it is I! Really, all these people must be mad or stupid! Can I see the investigating judge immediately?"

"My orders are to arrest you, and to take you to the Carmelite prison."

"Then take me! I have been a soldier, as you see," pointing to his button-hole, where he wore the ribbon of a military order; "so, of course, I know you must obey your orders." Then, as the officer, doubtless to give proof of his zeal, was about to take the artist by the collar, the latter added: "Oh, fear nothing, my good fellow; I have not the least intention of trying to escape. Really, all this is most odious and most idiotic—you may tell whom you please that I say so! But come; let us go." And,

very soon after, Felix Barthey was locked up, just as Madame Deblain had been the previous day.

On taking possession of the only decent room in the men's department of the prison to which M. Crosnier had had him conducted, the artist felt a little cast down; but that did not last long, for he was very energetic, and, besides, he felt that his detention could be but of short duration. He thought he would only have to appear before the investigating judge for him to perceive his mistake. Of course, he knew enough of law to be aware that he would be interrogated the next day; therefore, he had but one disagreeable night to get through, and, during the war, he had passed many a worse one.

He did not feel the least humiliation at his arrest, because he was sure none of his friends would doubt him for a moment. As for this investigating judge, he was too idiotic, and he would be sufficiently punished by the shame that the results of such a blunder would cause him.

As to the Attorney-General, who had tricked him by keeping him in his office as if he had been a visitor, whilst M. Babou was taking measures for his arrest, Barthey said to himself that he would be even with him some day.

What most tormented the young man was the thought of Madame Deblain being in prison. How would she endure this dreadful position; how could this young woman, accustomed to every comfort and luxury, endure this imprisonment!

These thoughts allowed him but little rest; and the next day, about noon, when the Governor told him to get ready to go before the investigating judge, he was in such haste that the policeman who was escorting him thought for a moment he meant to take flight, and was not quite reassured till he saw the door of M. Babou's office close on his prisoner.

"I was impatient, Monsieur, to appear before you," said Barthey, bowing to the magistrate, who was, as usual, leaning back in his chair, and wearing an arrogant expression.

"The law is that I shall examine all accused persons within twenty-four hours of their arrest, and I keep to the letter of the law."

"Ah, it is true that I am a prisoner, but still you must allow me to take a chair. I am not in the habit of standing while I talk with any one who keeps his seat."

And taking a chair he seated himself, while M. Babou said ironically:

"Please yourself; but please also to re-

member that *here* you are nothing but a prisoner."

"I am so little inclined to forget it that I shall be much obliged if you will inform me of what crime you suppose me guilty. I cannot imagine that you can be in earnest when you accuse me of that which is on your warrant—of being an accomplice in the poisoning of Monsieur Deblain. It is impossible you can believe either me or Madame Deblain guilty of that."

"It is not my business to hold conversations with you, but only to question you. Tell me your names, age, profession, and address."

"Raoul Felix Barthey; thirty-four years of age; artist, and late officer in the 102nd Foot; living in Paris, at 46 Rue d'Offémont."

"What is that decoration you are wearing?"

"It is one that a man can only win on the field of battle while risking his life for his country. It is one that some of your colleagues are proud to wear, because they valiantly won it by laying aside their robes and becoming soldiers."

M. Babou, who was known to have taken the office of a judge in order to escape the risk of serving in the army, could not help colouring.

"What are your means of living?  
haughtily.

"I have a fortune which brings me twenty thousand francs a year, and I earn about double that amount."

"By painting?"

"Certainly."

"You are accused of having furnished Madame Deblain with the poison she used to kill her husband."

"Poor woman! She a poisoner!"

"She has confessed her crime."

"Confessed! I do not believe it. If she has, she must have gone mad."

"Your manner of conducting yourself is not of a nature to better your present position!"

"I don't care about bettering my present position! I think it perfectly ridiculous."

"You deny that you were the accomplice of the guilty woman?"

"I deny it emphatically, and I am perfectly convinced of her innocence!"

"Then what is this?"

The magistrate placed on his desk, near which Barthey sat, the little metal box seized at the Malle.

"That," said the artist; "why that is arsenite of copper. I suppose you have been breaking into my drawers."

"It was my duty and my right to do so."

"All right!"

"Well, Monsieur Deblain was poisoned with some preparation of copper; you understand—of copper."

"And you think that—— Oh, really, this is too stupid!"

"You are insulting the magistracy in my person. Take care!"

"But, my good sir, you have been insulting common sense in my person for the last ten minutes. You are quite mistaken if you think you can frighten me. I am neither a child nor a fool; I am an honest man and a soldier." Barthey was speaking without any anger, but with a strange firmness, which rendered M. Babou furious, because he was so accustomed to see everybody tremble before him.

"And these—are they *too ridiculous?*" he said sarcastically, as he showed the artist the packet of letters which he had found in the Italian cabinet in Madame Deblain's bedroom.

This time the artist could not help showing some emotion, which was not lost on M. Babou. However, after a moment's reflection, he said, with perfect indifference:

"Those letters? What have I to do with them?"

"Nothing, but that they are *your* letters, addressed by you to Madame Deblain."

"From me to Madame Deblain! It is false!"

"You think you are safe because they are not signed. We shall see what the experts in writing say to that. As to the person to whom they were sent, there can be no doubt about that, because they were found in her bedroom." This he said with his spiteful smile; he felt happy in the conviction he had said something very witty.

"What! You think I was in correspondence with Madame Deblain?" said the young man, but with visible uneasiness.

"I do not *think* it—I am *sure* you were keeping up a most loving correspondence; and, thinking thus, I can explain all the rest."

"Oh, you think it will all be as easy as that, do you?"

"That is my opinion, and I believe it will be the opinion of the jury."

"Of the jury?"

"Yes, of the jury, when they learn that I discovered, carefully hidden in the same drawer, this arsenite of copper and the bill of the chemist who sold it to you. Monsieur Deblain was poisoned by his wife in the night of the

22nd of September, and this bill is dated the 18th."

"It was in the night of the 22nd of September that Monsieur Deblain died—that is true; I had forgotten that! And you accuse his wife of that crime?"

"Circumstances accuse her. You are too intelligent not to see how clear it all is."

Sitting, leaning his head on his hand, Barthémy kept repeating:

"In the night of the 22nd of September."

"You no longer deny it?" said M. Babou to him.

"No, Monsieur, I shall not give myself the trouble to deny it, because, really, it is all too ridiculous. You must pardon me for saying so, but, as you seem so perfectly convinced, I think it is useless to talk to you any longer."

"You have every right to be silent," said the judge; "I am quite aware of that; but you must sign your declarations."

"Not till I have read them over."

"My clerk writes only what he hears."

"Very likely, but I prefer to assure myself of it."

He took the two large sheets of manuscript, which the writer gave him, and read them carefully.



"Yes," said he, "it is tolerably exact." And he signed them. Then he bowed slightly to M. Babou, who had rung, and went back to the prison between two officers, who had been ordered by the magistrate to escort him. As he entered his cell, Barthey dropped into a seat, murmuring :

"Poor Rhea and I have to do with an obstinate fool. God knows how we shall come through this affair!"

M. Lachaussée returned from Paris to Vermel in the afternoon, after having had an interview with the Minister for Foreign Affairs, who warned him to be very careful about this affair, concerning which the United States Ambassador had spoken to him. Having been informed by M. Babou of what the latter called the *confessions* of Madame Deblain, and of the discoveries he had made at the Malle, M. Lachaussée wrote the same evening to the Foreign Office :

"The proofs which have accumulated during the last twenty-four hours against Madame Deblain and Felix Barthey are so overwhelming that we can but let justice take its course. The members of the court at Vermel will not fail to do their duty. We trust, Monsieur le Ministre that we shall give you reason to applaud the firmness and zeal of your respectful subordinates."

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While these matters were progressing, the townspeople, having heard of the arrest of the Parisian artist, were in a state of great commotion, and Madame Dusortois said to herself, with intense delight: "I know the law. That American poisoner will forfeit her rights of inheritance; then the two millions of my poor nephew will come to me!"

## CHAPTER VII

### WILLIAM WITSON APPEARS AT VERMEL

THINGS were in the state we have described when William Witson, the mysterious person we presented to our readers in the prologue of this story, arrived at Vermel.

At the Golden Lion hotel, where he was staying, nothing was talked of but the poisoning of M. Deblain, the arrest of his wife and her accomplice, and of the overwhelming nature of the charges brought against them.

Some people averred that M. Babou, the investigating judge, was much too clever a man to make mistakes; others, on the contrary, said, very irreverently, that he was an obstinate old idiot, who, rather than own himself mistaken in one instance, would condemn ten innocent people.

Thus the town was divided into two very distinct parties. In the one, they believed in the guilt of the pretty widow and Felix

Barthey; in the other, they did not *believe* it, and yet they were willing to admit that the case looked very grave against the accused, considering the result of the search at the house and the medico-legal report of Dr. Plemen, whose learning could no more be doubted than his respectability of character.

People pitied the eminent doctor for having been forced to lend his aid to justice in such terrible circumstances; and they admired the courage which allowed him to examine the remains of him who, for ten years, had been his intimate friend—all this having been done by him from sheer love of his profession, of truth, and of respect for the law.

What appeared most inexplicable to the defenders of Madame Deblain was the promptitude with which M. Babou had fixed on Felix Barthey as her accomplice—Felix, whom nobody except a few spiteful people had ever suspected of being the lover of the young woman, and who, consequently, could have no interest in the death of the husband.

But, as may be supposed, this idle gossip was not considered by William Witson as of much importance. He intended himself to go into a serious examination; and, as before all, he must be able to act with perfect liberty, without

stirring up either surprise or suspicion, his first care was to make use of some of the letters of introduction he had brought with him from Paris. It would be best for him that he should not be a stranger to the legal authorities of the chief town of Seine et Loire.

One of these letters had been given to him by a learned counsellor of the Court of Appeals, and commended him highly to M. de la Marnière, one of the most respected magistrates of the Court of Appeals of Vermeil. Another letter he had was from a high official in the Home Office, and it introduced him to M. Berton, central commissioner of the city; a third letter was from his banker in Paris, who introduced him to M. Meursan, the great provincial financier, giving him credit for a large sum of money.

Witson's first visit was to M. de la Marnière. The eminent counsellor received him immediately, and it needed but a moment for the American to see that he was in the presence of such a magistrate as d'Aguesseau desired them all to be—of irreproachable character, full of integrity and dignity in their private as in their public life.

M. de la Marnière was not much over fifty years old, and was exceedingly refined in face and manner. After having learned from Witson

the motive of his visit to Vermel, M. de la Marnière answered him with the reserve and discretion that his office as well as his character demanded.

"It is certain," he said, "that the prosecution to which Madame Deblain is being subjected is a matter of surprise not only to those who know her, but also to all thinking people who do not allow themselves to be led away by appearances. To suppose that a woman only twenty-two years old, a little frivolous perhaps, but about whom there is no proof of bad conduct—for the young Parisian who is talked of now as having had criminal relations with her, certainly does not wear an appearance of guilt—to suppose, I say, that such a woman could, in a moment, become a vile poisoner, is going too far! The authorities have hurried things on too fast, perhaps: but although I do not share any of the political opinions of the Attorney-General, nor of the investigating judge, I believe that, from a professional point of view, they are honourable men; who, if they find they are mistaken, will do their best to right the wrong.

"I have not the honour of knowing Monsieur Babou," said Witson, "and I have no letter to him. I intend, however, to go and ask him for permission to see Madame Deblain."

"I fear he will not grant it. Both she and Monsieur Barthey are being kept in perfect seclusion."

"What! that young lady, accustomed to a life of luxury, and against whom there are nothing but vague suspicions, is shut up in a cell, without the possibility of seeing any one whatever!"

"You are aware that the investigating judges are complete masters in such cases. That is the law."

"An inhuman, iniquitous, monstrous law! a law which makes of a house of detention a place of torture; which gives up an unfortunate creature—innocent, perhaps—to loneliness, despair, and madness! When it is a woman, too, who is so treated, there are no words black enough to paint such a measure!"

Witson was here on familiar ground; we know what was his indignation with regard to the unlimited power given by the law to investigating judges, who are too often young, inexperienced men, infatuated by their power, and seeing in everybody brought before them criminals to be prosecuted; fearing always that an acquittal will be reckoned up against them, whilst a condemnation, which proves their skill, may bring them promotion.

"Alas! you are, perhaps, right," said M. de la Marnière, "but things are so; and until the criminal code has undergone a wise and humane reform, there is nothing to be done."

"If I find Monsieur Babou too strict," said the American, "I can apply to his superiors: to the public prosecutor and to the chief judge."

"In this special case, as in all that concerns the order of the prosecution, the investigating judge is amenable to no one."

"Ah, that is true; I was forgetting that."

"I will add this, my dear sir, because of the frankness I owe to one who comes to me introduced by one of the most distinguished magistrates of our time—you will very certainly not be in good odour with the heads of our court, when they find out that you have come here as their enemy, or at least their adversary, since you interest yourself in Madame Deblain."

"I am an old friend of her father; I knew her as a child, and I cannot believe in her guilt. She is a foreigner here, alone, defenceless; I am her countryman. Is it not my duty to protect her until the arrival of Mr. Panton, who doubtless has been informed by telegraph of the terrible accusation brought against his daughter? It is impossible that the heads of your court, however prejudiced they may be, should take



umbrage at my friendly intervention. I do not know the gentlemen, but it is surely impossible that in France they can have attained to such high positions, without having given evidence of the possession of high character, capacity and independence. I have every confidence that I shall be well received by them, as well as by Messieurs Duret and Babou."

"I do not wish to discourage you, but allow me to give you one piece of advice—do not tell any of these gentlemen that your first visit was made to me."

"Why not?"

"Do not ask me to explain myself any farther."

M. de la Marnière, shaking his head, said these words with such a significant smile that Witson quite understood him. The magistracy of the court of Vermel was divided into two parties, and he could not get the ear of the side which would have been useful to him.

"I understand, Monsieur," said he, rising to take his leave. "Well, if these gentlemen receive me badly, or if they refuse to see me, I will act alone. Perhaps I shall be able to prove to them that I am no mean adversary."

After leaving M. de la Marnière, Witson went to see M. Berton; but this was simply in order

to establish his identity, so that he might not be considered by the authorities of Vermel as an intruder. They would be sure to grow anxious concerning the part to be played by a foreigner in the case in which the whole town was so deeply interested.

On presenting his letter to M. Berton, who was most obliging in his offers of service, Witson said to him :

"I am much indebted to you, sir, for your goodwill, and I shall not abuse it, either by embarrassing or compromising you."

The chief of police looked extremely surprised.

"Of course, Monsieur," pursued Witson, "you are in the interests of the court, and I have come to your city solely in the interests of Madame Deblain."

"Madame Deblain, the murderess of her husband!" exclaimed M. Berton.

"You see you already proclaim the guilt of this poor woman, whilst I, who it is true know little about the case, have great doubts of her guilt. I therefore cannot ask any service from you; I will only beg that when any one asks you who I am—a thing which will soon happen—you will reply that one of the chiefs of your administration has assured you of my respectability."

"Monsieur, I shall not fail to do so. But allow me to ask you one question. Why do you believe in the innocence of Madame Deblain?"

"I must say I have nothing more than a presentiment. I may be mistaken, but on learning, in Paris, the reasons for the arrest of this young woman, an American like myself, I felt it was my duty not to leave her unprotected, as her father is not with her."

"Mr. Panton must soon arrive: the court has telegraphed to him."

"And Monsieur Felix Barthey, the supposed accomplice of Madame Deblain—what of him?"

"He belongs to a highly respectable family living at Lyon; his brother has been in the town since yesterday."

"Have the brothers met yet?"

"No; by the order of the investigating judge, the accused persons are kept in the strictest seclusion."

"Have they not even seen the counsel whom they have chosen for their defence?"

"I do not think either of them has yet manifested the slightest wish to confer with any advocate. I must also tell you that Monsieur Babou is extremely reserved about everything touching his investigation. Since I did my part in the case he has not once spoken to me about it."

"Ah, I remember it was you who took the first step in the affair: perhaps you arrested Madame Deblain?"

M. Berton, who was a good-natured man, hesitated a little about admitting to this friend of Madame Deblain that it was indeed he who arrested her; however, he replied:

"I did nothing more. I may add that in a few days Madame Deblain and Monsieur Barthey will be authorized to hold communications with their lawyers, because the report of Dr. Plemen has been so positive, so overwhelming, that there need be no delay in bringing on the trial."

"Poor woman! What must be her agonies, even though, as I feel convinced, she is innocent! And this Dr. Plemen, whom I know by name and reputation, asserts that Monsieur Deblain died of poisoning by copperas?"

"He affirms that it is so; and it must be most painful to him, because he was the intimate friend of Monsieur Deblain and his wife. You may imagine he called up all his science to assure himself that he was not mistaken."

"He does not say that he thinks Madame Deblain is guilty, I suppose."

"He had nothing to do with that; on the contrary, he defends her most energetically; but he has demonstrated that Monsieur Deblain

was poisoned; it is for justice to find the assassins. Now I fear that your personal interest in the accused is blinding you; for, without betraying professional secrecy, I may tell you that the search made at the houses had a terrible result for the prisoners."

"The search? Ah, yes. Of course it was you who made the search; therefore I will not be so indiscreet as to ask you of what nature are the proofs that you have discovered of Madame Deblain's guilt. I suppose you would not answer me."

"It is my duty to be silent, you know."

"Yes; but it is my duty to make every possible research and inquiry, and I shall do it without delay. There is at the bottom of this horrid story some mystery which I will discover."

"I sincerely hope you may succeed, for, I need hardly tell you, I have no motive for ill-will to Madame Deblain. I was on excellent terms with her husband; and as for her, I have always found her charming, and most generous whenever I appealed to her charity on behalf of the poor."

"Well, we will meet again. I need not ask you to be secret as to the object of my visit. I will go now and see the public prosecutor and

the investigating judge. I hope they will admit me, although I have no letters of introduction to them."

"Oh, I am sure they will; but what I doubt is that they will tell you more than I have done."

"Well, then, I must seek information in other ways."

On leaving the chief of police, Witson went to the law courts. It was about the time he would find there the men he wished to see.

MM. Duret and Babou were in their offices. The American sent in his card to M. Duret, and was immediately admitted. He said:

"I have not the honour to be known to you, Monsieur, but I am an old friend of Madame Deblain, so my visit will not surprise you."

M. Duret bowed slightly, and very stiffly. He was a man between forty and fifty, with a pale, hard, but intelligent face, and rather red hair. He was gentlemanly, but affected a certain pomposity of manner which made him seem rather like a comedian who is always playing the same part. Witson continued:

"I did not have time to get a letter of introduction to you—a thing I could easily have done, because I am on intimate terms with many eminent legal men in Paris; but Monsieur

Berton will be able to tell you who I am. I was introduced to him by the chief at the Home Office; also, my arrival here was announced to Monsieur Meursan, one of the great financiers of the department."

M. Duret again bowed, rather less haughtily, but still did not say a word.

We know that our mysterious American was not the man to be easily disconcerted; so, without appearing to be the least annoyed at this cool reception, he continued:

"Being a fellow-countryman of Madame Deblain, and having been for years on intimate terms with her family, I could not hear without painful emotion of the prosecution to which she is being subjected; and I felt it my duty to come and place myself at her service—at least till her father, Mr. Elias Panton, my old friend, can come to her. I am, therefore, here to ask you, Monsieur, to authorize me to see this unhappy young woman, in whose guilt I cannot possibly believe."

"Sir," said M. Duret at last, in his harsh voice, "I have no power to grant your request. You are doubtless ignorant that, when a case is in the hands of the investigating judge, he alone has the right to give permission for a prisoner to see any one."

"I know it; I am well acquainted with French law, although I am an American; but, before going to see Monsieur Babou, I thought it would be more respectful to address myself first to you."

All this was said in a tone so clear, firm, and decided, that M. Duret could not help being struck by it. Consequently, his manner became comparatively polite as he said :

"Pray see Monsieur Babou. I rely implicitly on what he will think it right to do." Then rising from his seat, M. Duret bowed to his visitor, to intimate to him that the interview was ended.

Witson withdrew, and went straight to the office of the investigating judge, who was a man still young—forty, perhaps; very dark, with a sallow complexion and large black whiskers; a common style of face, with thin lips, a large nose, very sharp eyes, and a repulsive expression. Witson saw all this at a glance.

M. Babou was twirling about in his fingers the card the American had sent in.

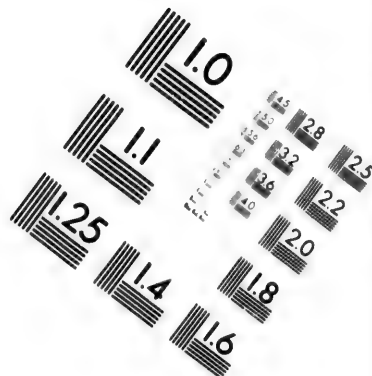
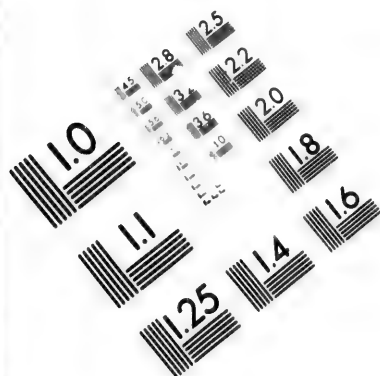
"Monsieur Witson?" asked he, with the drawling accent of a peasant.

"Yes, Monsieur," replied Witson.

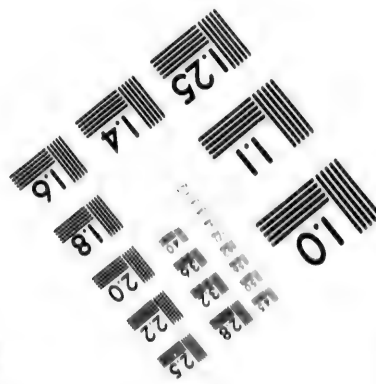
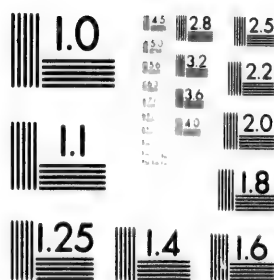
"What is your business with me?"

"I should like to tell you that in private,"





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said he, looking at the clerk who was seated at a table opposite the judge, and who was regarding him with inquisitive eyes as he gnawed his pen.

M. Babou hesitated a few seconds while he inspected his visitor from head to foot; then, doubtless feeling reassured by this examination, he made a sign, and the clerk went out, delighted to be set at liberty.

"Excuse the liberty I have taken," said Witson immediately, "but I have to address to you a request of such a nature that you will receive it, perhaps, more favourably if it is made privately."

"A request?" said M. Babou, leaning back in his chair with the air of a superior who is listening to a subaltern.

"My name has already informed you that I am not a Frenchman."

"Ah! then you are probably English?"

"No, American."

"Oh, English or American, it is all the same!"

"Yes, so far as language is concerned. But, Monsieur, I am not only American, but I am a native of Philadelphia."

"Of Philadelphia! Then you have come to speak of Madame Deblain."

"You are right. Being an old friend of her

family, and having known her as a child, you may imagine my grief when I learned the painful situation in which she is placed. I did not hesitate to come here in place of her parents, who are absent."

"Her father will soon be here; we are informed that he left New York yesterday."

"I am glad of it, for Mr. Pantou is a man of some importance, whose presence will be a great support to his daughter. Many of the manufacturers of this town know him well, he having had business relations with them for a quarter of a century."

"I know all that, but it does not explain to me the object of your visit."

"I come to ask you for permission to see Madame Deblain."

"*You* wish to see Madame Deblain! And why?"

"I took care, Monsieur, before I left Paris, to furnish myself with letters to prove who I am. As to my desire to see Madame Deblain, it is perfectly natural; I wish to assure the poor woman that she is not alone and unprotected."

This last word was probably offensive to M. Babou, for he answered roughly and unhesitatingly:

"It is impossible! The prisoner is in strict

seclusion, and nobody shall see her until my examination is ended."

"I am deeply grieved at your severity."

"I never act from *severity*; I do my duty."

"Then Mr. Panton himself will not be able to see his daughter?"

"He will see her no more than any other person unless I please."

"Can you, at least, inform me when this isolation of Madame Deblain will cease? It would be painful enough for a man to endure, but for such a woman as Madame Deblain it is certainly the most cruel torture."

"I can tell you nothing about it." As he said these words, in his nasal and overbearing tones, the investigating judge struck his bell and ordered his clerk to be recalled.

This was by way of intimating to his visitor that the interview was ended.

Witson rose, bowed to M. Babou, who barely returned the salute, and went out.

"A pompous ass!" thought the American as he descended the stairs. "Poor girl! I wish she had to do with even a worse man, were he but less stupid."

He returned slowly to the Golden Lion, thinking of the dreadful fate of her who had fallen into such hands.

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As he entered the hotel, Witson was confronted by a young woman, who, pale and trembling, was saying to a man, aged about forty, on whose arm she was leaning :

"They have arrested him, too ; oh, what shall we do !"

"We must keep up our courage," replied the man. "My brother is a soldier ; all the judges in the world cannot frighten him. Your sister is more to be pitied than he."

Witson saw immediately that these persons were the elder brother of M. Barthey, and the sister of Madame Deblain ; indeed, he only needed to look at Jenny to recognize her, although she had been quite a little girl when he left Philadelphia, ten years ago.

He eagerly went towards her, and Jenny recognizing him in her turn, after a moment's hesitation, held out her hand, exclaiming :

"You here, doctor—you ! Have you heard of this dreadful event ? Why are you here ?"

"I will tell you presently," replied Witson in English ; "but do not call me by my name, for must you call me 'doctor'—at least, not at present. We will save your sister, you may rest assured. Introduce me to Monsieur Armand Barthey."

The latter bowed in some surprise.

"Oh, I know you, sir," said Witson, bowing to Monsieur Barthey; "I am already fully informed of all that concerns your brother and Madame Deblain. Do not try to see him; you will seek in vain for permission from the investigating judge. If you will both give me a little of your time, I will tell you all that you need know about this abominable affair."

Inviting with a gesture M. Armand Barthey to follow him, he offered Madame Gould-Parker his arm, and led her to the rooms he occupied in the hotel.

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## CHAPTER VIII

IN WHICH THE READER WILL AGAIN MEET  
ELIAS PANTON AND THE REVEREND  
JONATHAN THOMPSON

ABOUT a week later William Witson was fully informed of all the enmity which Madame Deblain had excited almost immediately after her arrival at Vermel; of the jealousies she had stirred up; of the imprudences she had committed; and he perfectly understood the eagerness with which these commonplace people had hailed the accusation against the young lady, as well as the spiteful glee felt by a few envious women at the downfall of one who had so long excelled them in wealth and beauty. Poor Rhea's fellow-countryman also knew what disappointment M. Deblain's marriage had caused to his aunt Madame Dusortois, who had so long cherished the hope that her nephew would become her son-in-law, or at least that he would remain unmarried, and that her children would be his heirs.



This wretched woman had so freely expressed herself concerning Rhea, that the whole town knew of her hatred ; and Witson, proceeding by analysis and deduction, was soon persuaded that this woman, the mother of two penniless girls, was the author, or at least the instigator, of the infamous anonymous accusations which had been sent to the Attorney-General.

What was less clear to Witson, was how the idea of accusing Rhea of poisoning her husband had arisen in the mind of Madame Dusortois.

Had the wicked creature uttered this with the mere intention of calumniating Madame Deblain, and without much hope of the scandal being credited ; or—since the medical examination proved the violent death of M. Deblain—had his aunt really some knowledge of the criminal act before any one else suspected it ?

But why should this idea occur to Madame Dusortois, who was very seldom at her nephew's house, and who had only paid a very short visit there a very few days before his death, whilst none of the servants and none of his intimate friends had any such suspicions ?

This was a problem he could not solve, and therefore on this point he could only hope that the course of events would give him a clue to the enigma.

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As Witson's researches were also extended to the members of the court of Vermel, he knew all about them, and found his suppositions confirmed concerning MM. Duret and Babou. These researches were of a nature to alarm Witson concerning the situation of Madame Deblain, for he saw she was in the hands of magistrates prejudiced against her, and who perhaps, even should the results of the investigation leave them in doubt as to her guilt, would not be willing to give her the benefit of that doubt.

They had all gone too far to be able to draw back; Madame Deblain and Felix Barthey would have to be sent for trial, and must wait for a jury to declare their innocence.

When Witson could learn no more concerning the members of the court of Vermel, he naturally thought of Dr. Plemen, who held such a high position in public estimation; and, after having asked M. Meursan the banker for an introduction to the learned doctor, he called on him. Plemen received him eagerly, and Witson was struck with the accents of grief in which the doctor answered him, when he made known the object of his visit.

"I am undergoing one of the most painful experiences incident to my profession," said Plemen. "Ah! if I had known what would

happen, I should certainly have refused to undertake the autopsy. I cannot understand why the investigating judge should be so determined to see a crime in a case which is certainly to be attributed to an accident."

"You have no doubt, then, that your friend was poisoned?"

"As to that I could not be mistaken. The analysis was, alas! too easy."

"That is true, Monsieur; you are not only a skilful doctor, but a learned toxicologist; therefore I must admit the correctness of your report, although it overthrows one of my opinions—or, rather, an idea which I had taken up, and for which, I must confess, I had not much reason."

"What was this idea?"

"I thought I remembered having read somewhere that copperas was not a sufficiently violent poison to cause death, and that it only caused a degree of illness which it was easy to relieve."

"That is an opinion some of my brethren have published, rather for the purpose of attracting public attention than from scientific conviction. They dispute about words. Copperas does not act as vegetable poisons do, that is certain; nor in the same way as some other mineral poisons do; but the maladies caused by it are no less serious, and often mortal."

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"Do you think it could, in some cases, cause speedy death?"

"No; but it may happen that the patient who takes it is in such a morbid condition, in consequence of his treatment by other drugs, that his death would look as if it had been sudden. It is my opinion that that is what happened to Monsieur Deblain. He had a disease of the stomach which I did not quite understand, and which I, perhaps, did not treat rightly; besides this, he tried to soothe the pains he felt by injections of morphine. The attack which killed him probably came on while he was under the influence of this narcotic. That would explain his not having struggled nor called for help."

"Yes, yes, I see! But you will tell all this, will you not?"

"Certainly; I am impatiently waiting for the investigating judge to call me—not as a medical legist, but as the doctor who attended Monsieur Deblain. Oh! Monsieur Babou will be obliged, at last, to believe that the woman he accuses is innocent. Poor, unhappy creature! And it is my work! Mine!"

The profound grief expressed by Plemen did not permit Witson to prolong his visit. He had heard the reports of the peculiar relations of the

doctor and Rhea ; and, although he did not believe the story, he could feel for the doctor, in the dreadful situation into which a sad fate had driven him. After having been compelled, by his professional honour, to testify to the violent death of his friend, he had been the means of driving the wife of that friend into the clutches of the law ; a woman whom he could not but love, though that love had nothing criminal about it ; it really was too horrible ! As to Plemen's explanations, they were so clear that they left not the shadow of a doubt.

Yes, M. Deblain did die of poison ; but the American found it less easy to believe that his death had been so sudden that he could not rise, nor cry out ; and that his wife, whose room was next to his, should have heard nothing.

This point, which, for him, was so obscure, greatly preoccupied him, and he hardly dared to let his mind dwell on it, in the conviction which he had, and which he wished to keep, of Madame Deblain's innocence.

Thinking of these things, our mysterious friend went back to his hotel, where he learnt that Mr. Elias Panton had just arrived, not alone, but accompanied by a friend or relation.

Madame Deblain's father had already heard from Jenny of the presence of Witson at

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Vermel, and the motives which had brought him there; so, as soon as he appeared, Mr. Panton hastened to greet him.

"My dear friend! my dear Maxwell," he exclaimed, "can you understand this affair! To think they should dare to accuse my daughter, my darling Rhea, of being a poisoner. When the news came to me in Philadelphia I thought I should go mad! But I am here now, and I will let them know it! Our Ambassador is making a stir about this shameful business! Ah, those who have dared to imprison my girl shall pay dearly for it, I swear!"

"Be calm, my dear Elias, be calm," replied Witson, who did not seem surprised that the great American manufacturer had called him "Maxwell," which was his real name; "we shall soon put an end to this stupid affair; I have already learnt a good deal about it."

"And the hand of God will lie heavy on the wicked," added, in a solemn voice, the companion of Mr. Panton, as he offered his hand to Witson.

"The Reverend Jonathan Thompson!" said Witson, as he recognized the clergyman, whose grief had taken nothing from the absurdity of his language or appearance.

"It is I. My sister, whose despair made her quite ill, could not accompany her husband; so,

as I would not let him come alone to this wicked land——”

“Before everything,” interrupted Panton, “I must see my daughter!”

“You will not be allowed to see her,” replied Witson.

“Not be allowed! Not allowed to see my child? Who will hinder me?”

“Those by whom she is accused, and who are rigorously using the right French law gives them to keep her secluded from the sight of every one.”

“But that is monstrous—horrible! What! In our enlightened age, can such a law exist among a civilized people?”

“Unfortunately, it can and does. But the seclusion in which your daughter has been kept for these three weeks cannot last much longer—only a few days at most—because the law only allows an accused person to be kept in seclusion for ten days. It is true that the gaolers can renew this cruel measure for a further period. Let us be patient. I will save her. I came to Vermel for that purpose.”

“Ah, that is true—forgive me! I never even thought to ask you how it is I met you here, nor why you disappeared so suddenly from Philadelphia years ago.”

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"I will tell you all about that and many other things later on. Let us think of nothing now but your child."

"Ah, why did not Rhea marry my good Archibald?" groaned Jonathan.

"It is very certain," said Witson rather impatiently, "that if she had become Mrs. Archibald Thompson she might now be accused of poisoning your son, but not Monsieur Deblain."

"Yes, but Jonathan is right," said Elias, with tears in his eyes. "Ah, why did my dear daughter marry a Frenchman?"

"How did this marriage come about?" asked Witson.

"My brother-in-law here can tell you that; it was his work."

At the angry tones of Elias the reverend gentleman hung down his head, but he was obliged to relate what took place one morning in the garden of the Star Tavern, Camden Place.

"Then your daughter did not love her husband?" asked Witson, when the clergyman had ended his story.

"She was not in love with him, certainly," replied Panton; "but when she left home she appeared delighted at being Madame Deblain; and, in all her letters, she spoke of her husband in the most affectionate terms. She found her-



self so happy that she advised her sister to get married, so as to come and join her in France; and that was what made Jenny consent to marry Colonel Gould-Parker."

"Ah, I wondered how it was you had that rough fellow for a son-in-law."

"Oh, he was not *my* choice, any more than was Monsieur Deblain; it was Jenny, who was mad to go and live in Paris. She only took the colonel because he was nominated military attaché to the Embassy in France. However, her husband has not troubled her much, for he has been away more than a year on a mission to Japan, and during that time Jenny has lived nearly always with her sister."

"Was she with Rhea when her husband died?"

"I don't know, but most likely she was; for Parker, who is very jealous, confided his wife to Rhea, who, by the way, is the younger sister. Shall I ask her to come to us? She is in her room."

Jenny had never thought for a moment of going to the Malle or to the Deblains' town-house; she had taken up her abode at the Golden Lion, and so had M. Armand Barthey.

"No; I should like to question her when I can see her alone. I want her to tell me the minutest details of her life and her sister's while

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they were together; for, perhaps, from some seemingly insignificant detail enlightenment will come. Meanwhile, have courage; do not despair; this terrible accusation, which seems to rest on such solid grounds, will be overturned by some slight fact, I feel sure. That fact I am certain to discover."

"Oh, my dear Maxwell, how that assurance comforts me! My girl, my poor girl! How shall we ever reward you for such a service?"

"By opening your doors to me in Philadelphia, to which place I hope soon to return with you. It is not only your child's deliverance I am working at, but my own."

"Your deliverance!"

"Yes, my dear old friend; but do not question me now; I must not tell you more at present. Do not let it be known who I really am; call me, as everybody does, William Witson. Some day I shall have to thank your daughter, because I shall owe it to her that I can again become what I once was."

And pressing the hand of the unhappy father, who did not understand in the least what he meant by what he had just said, the unexpected champion whom Heaven had sent to Madame Deblain, took leave of his fellow-countrymen, leaving them full of confidence in him.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE INVESTIGATION

WHILST William Witson was going into the personal investigations of which we have just given a summary narration, M. Babou was pursuing his examination with a degree of zeal such as he had never hitherto displayed in any case, zealous as he had always been.

Being perfectly familiar with the criminal code, he used, and even abused, the exorbitant rights the law gave him. He began by making himself acquainted with the contents of all the papers he had seized at the Malle; and, on reading the letters he had found in Madame Deblain's bedroom, his delight was unbounded. These love-letters, which he felt sure were addressed to the young woman, he was equally sure were from Barthey.

Although the artist had only signed them with a kind of hieroglyph, his writing was perfectly recognizable; and some of these letters gave terrible force to the accusation.

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Among other passionate things the lover had written : " Why are you not free, my dear love ? Shall we never be able to live, as we should like to live, in Paris, which you are so fond of ? Must I always adore you in secret, always be under the fear of compromising and ruining you ? I leave to others ambition, fortune, honours : I have but one ambition—to be loved always by you ; I have no need to reproduce your lovely face on my canvas—it is too deeply engraven in my heart."

It was impossible for anything to be clearer : of course M. Deblain was the one who was ambitious of honours. The beloved one was certainly she who could only be seen furtively, secretly ; whilst they would have been always together if she had gone to Paris, as she would have done had M. Deblain been elected. Therefore, logically (according to M. Babou), on the day when it became evident M. Deblain would not be elected, he had been doomed to death by those to whose guilty love he was an obstacle.

Another letter, discovered in the drawer of the artist's work-table, seemed, to the magistrate, to speak no less clearly. It was from the Prince de Linar, who said to his friend :

" Shall you not soon be coming back to Paris, my dear Barthey ? It is true that if I were in

your place, I would not leave such a Paradise for the Parisian *Inferno*. What a lucky fellow you are, and how I envy you! It would be impossible to have a more adorable hostess than the one in whose house you are now staying; remember me to her most kindly, also to her charming sister."

Evidently, from this letter, even M. Barthey's friends were perfectly aware of his intimacy with Madame Deblain.

To these two documents, which to him seemed the strongest proofs, M. Babou added the bill of the artists' colourman, Trousin; a bill in which one considerable item was for arseniate of copper, and which was dated 10th September; that is, less than a fortnight before M. Deblain was poisoned. Did ever an accusation rest on more solid bases?

Then the magistrate heard the evidence of the doctors, Magnier and Plemen. The first of these gentlemen, who had never attended M. Deblain, and who had done nothing but certify to his death, could only repeat to the investigating judge what had been his impression, on examining the deceased. Everything then seemed to him to point to suffocation from some natural cause. The idea of a crime had never occurred to him, knowing the kind of life led by

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M. Deblain, and by how skilful and kind a doctor he was attended. The death must have been quite sudden—perhaps after a few moments' struggle or a stifled cry.

As to Dr. Plemen, he adhered to the conclusions to which the medical examination had brought him; but he asserted, most energetically, that there could be no question of a crime; that there must have been an accident, and that it was in that sense the investigation ought to be made.

Unfortunately, as we have seen, M. Babou's mind was made up, in consequence of the letters and the poison he had found. Therefore he replied to the learned toxicologist, with an ironical smile:

"Oh, on that point, I know more than you, with all your science; unless, indeed, you have made a mistake."

"Alas! that is not possible!"

After uttering this exclamation in a tone of intense grief, Plemen retired in despair, whilst the magistrate was saying to himself:

"Poor doctor! he is really in a very painful position. To have to give up to justice a woman he has loved—whom he perhaps still loves—is enough to upset him! And how he would have cheated us all if he could have known whom I

suspect ! But they have to do with a pretty shrewd fellow, in me ! ”

Having received these first depositions, the investigating judge drew up a long list of witnesses to be heard ; and if he had dared he would even have summoned some from America. Then he had a plan drawn, not merely of the first floor, but of the whole of Deblain's town-house, without regard to the great expense of the proceeding, which mattered little to him, since these costs would fall on those whom he already considered as condemned.

When the time came for examining the witnesses, it was first the servants who appeared before M. Babou ; but their evidence was nearly all alike.

All said that Madame Deblain had been a most gentle, kind, and generous mistress ; and they had never heard, between her and her husband, the slightest dissension ; they lived together on the best possible terms, and none of the servants could remember anything which could give rise to the suspicion that Madame Deblain ever acted contrary to the will of her husband, or that he blamed her in any way. They had always seen their master cheerful and happy, until within the last few months of his life, when he had begun to worry himself about politics.

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Being questioned as to the guilty relations of Madame Deblain, first with Dr. Plemen and afterwards with M. Barthey, the servants replied that they had never observed anything of the kind.

Ternier and his wife, the gatekeepers at the Malle, made no hesitation about admitting that Madame Deblain had sometimes passed the night there, when her husband would be at the town-house; but that had always been while Madame Gould-Parker was staying there, and M. Deblain had never made the least objection to it; on the contrary, he had always been the first to tell his wife to be as much as possible with her sister, whose health was not good, and who seemed to be grieved at the lengthened absence of her husband.

M. Babou could not get any information that was at all more satisfactory to him from Pauline Madame Deblain's maid. In vain he cross-questioned her for hours; in vain he threatened her with arrest, and sternly told her that her silence would authorize him to suppose that she was an accomplice of her mistress, and that she certainly knew more than she chose to admit Pauline constantly said the same things.

"Madame was fond of pleasure and luxury, but she was a good woman. Monsieur Barthey



was nothing to her but a friend, and he had never been in the least too familiar. It has happened to me twenty times, as it has to any one about the house, to enter the studio, where Monsieur Felix was painting Madame's portrait, without being called ; and neither my presence nor that of the other servants caused her the least annoyance."

Being questioned as to what Madame Deblain was doing in the evening of the 22nd of September, the girl said :

"I was not very well that evening, and Madame sent me to bed directly after dinner. I did not see her till the next day, when I went into her room to tell her the dreadful news ; then the only thing which struck me was her grief and despair."

"Were the dressing-room doors, which divide Monsieur Deblain's room from his wife's, open or shut ?" asked M. Babou.

"I do not know, as I did not help to undress Madame that night."

"And you were in the habit of doing so ?"

"Of course I was ; I never went to bed till Madame had done with me."

"Ah, yes ; but on that evening, the 22nd of September, she sent you away much earlier than usual."

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And ten times, twenty times, the investigating judge asked Pauline the same questions, and always got the same replies.

Pierre, the valet, testified that he had gone with his master to his room about ten o'clock, leaving Madame Deblain and the doctor in the smoking-room, and that, after he had done what his master required of him, he had retired to his room. M. Deblain had gone to bed immediately, and had ordered Pierre to put by his bedside the medicine he took every night, and the little phial containing morphine, which he sometimes used for injection. M. Deblain seemed agitated, and he complained of pains in his head and stomach.

The next morning, about half-past eight, when he went very quietly into his master's room, to see if he were asleep, Pierre found him dead. Then, without making any kind of examination of the bed, being struck with fright and horror, he had rushed downstairs, calling for help.

Of all the things of which Madame Deblain was accused, the poor fellow knew nothing ; as he had had nothing to do with anybody but his master. He never even saw the mistress of the house except at meal-times, but he could swear that he had never heard M. Deblain complain of his wife.

The coachman, Dumont, stated that Madame Deblain had never but once returned alone from the Malle with M. Barthey in a closed carriage. When she went with M. Barthey she used herself to drive a victoria or a phaeton.

M. Babou had no better luck with the Prince de Linar, nor with the colour merchant, M. Trousin. The Prince indignantly repelled the meaning that had been put on his correspondence with his friend Barthey. He had never meant to intimate that the artist was kept at the Malle by his passion for its mistress, but merely that he stayed there because of the pleasure he must have in the company of two charming women, whom he himself regarded as worthy of all possible respect.

As to the artists' colourman, he could not understand what all this fuss was about. He had sent arseniate of copper to M. Barthey just as he might have sent him any other colour. It was the first time, to be sure, that M. Barthey ever had ordered arseniate of copper, but the order had not in the least surprised him; he had often sent it to other artists who had old-fashioned ideas about mixing their own paints.

In causing the copper cooking utensils to be seized at the house, M. Babou had fancied he would find some indications of a nature to

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explain the possession of copperas by Madame Deblain ; and the recent tinning which some of the vessels had undergone had seemed to him, at first, a proof of the justness of his idea ; but the discovery of arseniate of copper in Barthey's room had made him relinquish that point of his investigation. Nevertheless, in order to neglect nothing, he questioned Nicholas, the steward, who said :

" My mistress never entered the kitchen. After my master's death, I took it on myself to have everything put in order, as we were leaving the town-house to live entirely at the Malle."

And as the tinman affirmed that none of the vessels sent to him had any traces either of verdigris or of scraping about them, M. Babou felt doubly satisfied at having laid hands upon the poison which the murderers had evidently used ; for he began to think his first suppositions had been rather ridiculous. The only witness that was really of any use to M. Babou was Madame Dusortois ; she needed no urging forward—not she ! She related ten times more than was wanted to prove the guilt of her niece. According to this excellent woman, she had foreseen everything, from the first of her nephew's marriage. Deblain was extremely

weak; his wife ruled him completely; he did not dare to resist her. By these means the American woman had separated Deblain from all his family, and had made him leave her all his fortune. How *many* times she had seen her nephew ill, nervous, worn out with the mad extravagance of his wife! How many times he had been on the point of telling all to her—to her, his mother's sister! But he was afraid to do it—afraid of that American! Neither did he dare to confide his troubles to his friend Plemen, not only because he feared Plemen would laugh at him, but, perhaps, also because he suspected the intrigue which existed between him and Rhea.

It was by way of getting rid of his suspicions and diverting his mind that Deblain had gone into politics, added Madame Dusortois. If he had been elected, as he hoped to be, he would then have removed his wife from the doctor's influence, because he would be seldom at Vermel. He little knew then that M. Barthey had taken the place of M. Plemen in Rhea's affections, and he little thought that in leaving Vermel he would be acting exactly according to the desire of her who was deceiving him. The poor creature was quite blind!

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of an aunt related what she had observed on the morning when she went to the house on learning her nephew's death.

"On entering Raymond's room," said she, "when I saw him who had long been lifeless, I felt at first great grief; then to this grief was added a great despair, for not only had he died alone, without one kind hand to close his eyes, but he had died without the consolations of religion. This thought was so painful to me that it led me to ask myself how it was possible that he could have died without his wife having heard a sound. Surely he *must* have called for help! There was a dreadful expression of suffering visible on his face, and although the room had been partly put in order, the bed was disarranged. I hastened to Madame Deblain. She was crying, but she did not seem to me to be in such deep grief as she pretended; and when I asked her how it was that Raymond's cries did not awaken her, her answers were full of confusion: that I well remember."

The terrible part of all these details given by Madame Dusortois was, that she was obviously saying it all in as perfect good faith as a person can who is blinded by hatred. She was absolutely convinced of the truth of her assertions; consequently, M. Babou did not for a moment

doubt anything she chose to relate. It was principally on her depositions that the accusations rested, and this put it into the head of the magistrate to make an experiment in acoustics, in order to assure himself whether or not it was possible for Madame Deblain not to have heard her husband.

With this intention he went one morning to the house with his clerk, and there, in the presence of the servants, he made his clerk lie down on M. Deblain's bed, with orders to struggle and to utter cries and groans, whilst he, shut up in the room of the guilty wife, should ascertain how much of these sounds was audible through the two dressing-rooms which divided them.

The proof was decisive; the investigating judge could distinctly hear the slightest sound made by his clerk, and this in daylight. How, then, could it be believed that, in the silence of night, M. Deblain had called for help without making his wife hear?

On this point there could not be the least doubt. If Madame Deblain had not gone to aid the man who was dying a few paces from her in dreadful tortures, it was because it suited her to keep away, either from cruelty or from terror, because she dared not meet the last look of her victim.

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All these matters ended, and his evidence all collected, M. Babou at last gave permission to Madame Deblain and Felix Barthey to communicate with their lawyers and to receive the visits of their friends.

Rhea and the artist had been in seclusion for nearly a month, and for a fortnight Mr. Panton, the Rev. Jonathan, and M. Armand Barthey had been in Vermel, where excitement ran high among the public. However quietly M. Babou's investigations had been conducted, certain things had leaked out. Among other matters, it was known that Madame Deblain, after having appeared once before him, had refused to go again to his office, or to answer him when he had gone to the prison to interrogate her.

It was also known that M. Felix Barthey had acted much in the same manner, and that, consequently, the evidence was incomplete. It was, therefore, thought that the trial would bring out unexpected revelations, and most people condemned Babou's severity in keeping Madame Deblain so long in solitary confinement. He had grudgingly permitted her to receive a few lines from her father, and to answer him, on condition that he should first read the respective letters.

Feeling deeply humiliated at this last precau-



tion, Rhea had never written more than a few words each morning to her father and sister. Mr. Panton was in a high state of indignation, and was talking of killing off all the lawyers in Vermel, when he received permission to see his child. He hastened, with his brother-in-law, to the Carmelite prison, his elder daughter having gone that day to Paris; and we can easily imagine what was the first interview of the indignant father with his imprisoned daughter. He burst into tears when she threw herself into his arms. Then kissing her poor, thin face, he pressed her to his heart, murmuring:

"Rhea! My little Rhea! Oh, the wretches, the rascals, to imprison you, to accuse you!"

Never had his daughter seemed so dear to him. He held her off from him, but only at arm's-length, to read in her worn face the trace of all the sufferings she had undergone during the last month. Then pressing her again to his breast he exclaimed:

"Just look, Jonathan, what a state they have brought her to! Oh, the savages! Worse, worse than savages! I would like to kill them all, the cowards!"

Poor Rhea answered her father only with caresses. As to Jonathan, he could hardly utter a word, for he was really fond of his

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At last, at Rhea's entreaty, Mr. Panton calmed himself, and she related to him all that had taken place since her arrest. She ended her story by saying :

"Fear nothing, father. It will not be difficult to prove my innocence. We will soon return all together to Philadelphia, to my dear mother. I ought never to have left her. To-day I shall see Monsieur Langerol, one of the best lawyers in the town, whose wife is an intimate friend of mine. I have chosen him as my advocate."

"You will have another besides him," said Elias.

"Who will it be ?"

"An old friend of mine, whom you perhaps remember—Dr. Maxwell, who disappeared so suddenly."

"Stephen Maxwell ! I should think I do remember him ! But how comes he to be at Vermel ?"

"He is here entirely on your account. He came here from Paris as soon as ever he heard what was going on. As for the reason for his disappearance from Philadelphia, nobody knows anything about it."

"Shall I see him?"

"Yes; but he thought it more prudent not to come with me this morning. However, I am quite sure he has not been wasting his time. Oh, the rascals! to be keeping you locked up here, in this miserable room, deprived of every comfort!"

Falling into a fresh fit of rage, Mr. Panton regarded the wretched place in which his daughter had been compelled to spend so many weeks, and where she must still remain for many more. It took all the influence of his daughter's caresses\* to calm him, the exhortations of his brother Jonathan being of no avail—in fact, only adding to his impatience.

At the same moment, Felix Barthey was receiving a visit from his brother, and M. Leblanc, one of the best known lawyers of Paris, who, ever since the arrest of the painter, had held himself at his disposal, feeling assured, as he did, that in the terrible adventure in which Felix was involved there was some absurd mistake.

Having been warned by a telegram that the prisoner might at last communicate with his relations and his lawyers, M. Leblanc had not lost a moment in going to Vermel. He arrived just in time to accompany M. Armand Barthey

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to the prison. He had been an intimate friend of Felix for ten years, so the artist received him with open arms, and there needed but a few words to put M. Leblanc in possession of all the facts.

"It is none the less true," he said to the artist, "that you are accused of poisoning. It is idiotic enough; but still everything is of importance in such a case. I must go and visit your judges, as is customary; I will see them to-morrow, and so find out what kind of men we have to deal with. I shall be staying at the house of Monsieur Langerol, who is the advocate of Madame Deblain. In twenty-four hours we shall have copies of the evidence, and we will consult together. Poor Madame Deblain! All this is infinitely more painful for her than for you."

As to M. Armand Barthey, he had contented himself with embracing his brother, whom he would now see every day. He had never entertained the smallest doubt of the innocence of Felix.

That same evening George Leblanc was put in communication with William Witson, whom Mr. Panton had introduced to M. Langerol, and all these friends of the prisoners were prepared for the struggle with M. Babou.

The next day, Madame Gould-Parker returned from Paris, and hastened to the prison. The interview of the sisters was very touching. Locked in each other's arms, they remained for some time, unable to utter a word; they could only exchange kisses and sighs.

Rhea was the first to grow calm. She said to Jenny:

"Have you been called before the investigating judge?"

"No; and I am very much surprised at it. Many times I have wished to see him, but Monsieur Langerol never would let me."

"Thank God for that! Now, listen—listen to me attentively—and do not forget one of my words!"

"Oh! speak—speak, Rhea! You terrify me!"

"You are sure you love me, are you not?"

"How can you ask me—oh, my darling!" And she again pressed her sister in her arms.

Madame Deblain gently disengaged herself, and resumed:

"You know that the letters you confided to my care have been seized. Now, the investigating judge is convinced that they were written by Felix Barthey, and in those letters he sees a proof that Felix was my accomplice in crime."

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"Oh, how dreadful! I must tell the truth! I must tell them that those letters were written to me!"

"No, you must not! I entreat you to keep silence, not only about those letters, but, if *any* questions are asked about my way of life at the Malle, the excursions I used to make to it, or my reasons for going there, you must swear to me that you will make no other answer than, 'I know nothing about it.'"

"But if my silence were to be your ruin?"

"There are certain things which must for ever remain secrets for all but you and me. One word, one single word from you, may be more fatal than your refusal to speak can possibly be. They would put to your words a meaning dangerous for us both. My darling Jenny, promise me, as you value the life of our good mother, to obey me blindly and implicitly."

"But just explain to me——"

"I cannot! Let who may question you, should it be father himself who asks you, 'Had your sister a lover, and was that lover Felix Barthey?' content yourself with answering, 'I do not think so, nothing ever led me to believe it.' If you are asked: 'Did Madame Deblain come to the Malle on the evening of the 22nd of September?' say, 'At that time I was ill,

and my sister often came to see me in the evening, but I cannot remember what happened on that particular evening.'"

"Rhea! My dear Rhea!" Jenny dropped into a seat, covered her face with her hands, and burst into tears.

Rhea knelt down beside her, put her arms round her, and kissing her said:

"Do not cry so, you will not be questioned; they would have begun long ago if they had meant to question you. But, if you love me, swear to obey me!"

"You insist upon it?"

"I beseech you; it is for your happiness and mine."

"Well, then, I swear! It shall be as you say; but still, remember, I am ready to give up, for you, my life and my honour!"

"Ah, I know it! But now the hour for appearing before my judges may come when it will; they will find me strong and fearless!"

The two daughters of Elias Panton sealed their mysterious compact with a kiss.

In less than a week MM. Langerol and Leblanc had seen all the witnesses who had been summoned by M. Babou, except Madame Dusortois, and all their inquiries were finished.

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they had chosen, as medical expert, Mr. Stephen Maxwell ; and they demanded, conformably to the law, that the organs examined by Dr. Plemen should be placed at the disposal of Dr. Maxwell, so that he might make a farther examination, should he judge it necessary.

This request of the prisoners' advocates seemed extremely absurd to M. Babou. To doubt the learning of Dr. Plemen, to dispute his medical report, seemed to the investigating judge absolute impertinence, and, as it were, a fresh proof that the advocates of the prisoners did not know what to do in order to rebut the evidence.

Nevertheless, he gave orders to the chief of police, M. Berton, to accede to the demand of the defence. He then learned that this would necessitate a fresh exhumation; for not only had Dr. Plemen omitted to divide into two parts the organs he had removed from the body, and he had made his experiments on the whole of them, but the usual order had not been followed—namely, “to replace the body in a sealed coffin, which shall remain at the disposal of the law.”

Certainly this was a vexatious thing for the great doctor of Vermel to have done ; but M. Babou never thought for a moment of rendering him responsible for it. Never in any pre-



ceding criminal trial, for ten years past, had a second medical examination been demanded.

The chief of police was, therefore, obliged to proceed to a second exhumation ; the body of the unfortunate Raymond was again taken from its coffin, and again subjected to examination by Dr. Maxwell ; who, because he was a foreigner, was compelled, by the investigating judge, to receive the assistance of Dr. Magnier.

But Dr. Magnier was not only a clever doctor, but a true gentleman ; and he needed but a few minutes' conversation with Maxwell to see that he had to do with a skilful man ; consequently, they became quite friendly.

From motives of deference, and also from spitefulness towards his adversaries, M. Babou had informed Dr. Plemen of what was going on ; for the old friend of poor Raymond never left his house now except to see his patients. In consequence of ill-health, he had even, for the moment, resigned the governorship of the hospital. He said to M. Babou :

" The defence are only using their just rights ; if the expert they have chosen can prove I have made a mistake, nobody will be more glad of it than I."

These few words were extremely annoying to M. Babou, whose professional pride was very

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much worked up ; because, for a month past, so much had been done, against him, in the interests of those whom he considered guilty.

General Sauvière, under whom Felix had won his military decoration, had himself called on M. Babou ; and, with soldierly abruptness, had said he was ready to answer for the artist with his own honour. People in Paris, of the highest station, had written to M. Babou in the same terms. The chief secretary of the American Embassy, a friend of Colonel Gould-Parker, had made several journeys from Paris to see Madame Deblain, and the heads of the law courts at Vermeil ; the chief attorney had been warned that the case must be conducted with the greatest circumspection, and no step taken but on the surest ground.

However, instead of troubling the conscience of the investigating judge, all these marks of sympathy for the accused had had a diametrically opposite result. In face of the opposition of others, his convictions deepened, and he so hurried things on, he so drove the chief attorney—for M. Duret, the Attorney-General, had withdrawn from the affair—that in less than a week Rhea Deblain and Felix Barthey were sent for trial, under the accusation of poisoning Raymond Deblain.

This terrible news, which stunned Mr. Pantou, Jonathan, and Madame Gould-Parker, did not surprise Rhea or Felix; because their advocates, MM. Langerol and Leblanc, had never allowed them to hope, for a single moment, that M. Babou would give orders for an acquittal. He had gone too far—not that he could not draw back, if his conscience had commanded him to do so; for, as we have said, he was not a dishonest man, but he had gone too far to be able to see things in their right light. Without thinking of it, without admitting it to himself, he thought his professional honour was at stake; his wife had too often said to him since the beginning of the affair, “Jérôme, you have your advancement in your own hands,” for him not to be absolutely convinced of his own clear-sightedness and his great intelligence.

As to Dr. Maxwell, after having studied the report of Dr. Plemen, and concluded his own chemical analysis, he said to MM. Langerol and Leblanc:

“The court of Vermel little thinks what surprises I have in store for them.”

He then went to the Carmelite prison, where, on seeing Rhea and Felix, he assured them that all this horrid affair would end in confusion to their enemies.

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The case was to be tried at the end of December, and the time was at hand for branding with infamy, or finally acquitting, these two unfortunate young creatures, who, for three months, had been undergoing the moral tortures of solitary confinement.

According to custom, on the day before the opening of the trial, M. de la Marnière, chief justice of the assizes for that session, had an interview with the prisoners, and he left the cell of each of them feeling deeply moved.

"A sad and mysterious affair!" murmured the eminent judge, as he went homewards. "If these unfortunate people are innocent, as I believe them to be, I must do my duty, and yet try to save the dignity of the law, which has been so imprudently compromised."

## CHAPTER X

## BEFORE THE HEARING

THE next day, the 26th of December, which, by a strange chance, was the anniversary of the day on which "Frou-Frou," had drawn all the best society of Vermel to the Malle, the doors of the assize court were opened to the public at ten o'clock in the morning.

The crowd, who had been impatiently waiting since the early morning—a crowd composed mostly of the lowest people—rushed into the court, and soon filled up all the available standing room. The benches, which occupied the middle of the immense criminal court, had been filled very early by those privileged persons who were furnished with tickets. Two benches alone remained unoccupied—those on which the witnesses would seat themselves after they had given their evidence.

As to the seats in front of the benches, they awaited those important persons who had no need to arrive very early, as their places were

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reserved for them. Many people were surprised that M. Marnière should have had the seats so arranged, because he had often been heard to speak indignantly against turning a court of justice into a kind of theatre. Why, then, this change in his opinions? It was before this immense audience that poor Rhea was about to appear.

Not only must she defend herself against an odious accusation, but she must do it in the presence of those who had been her guests, her friends—of those who had courted her on account of her wealth and beauty—in the presence of those women of whose hatred she was aware, whose base jealousy had always made them spies upon her, and whose ironical glances would now tell her all the wicked joy they felt in her abasement. How could M. Marnière have allowed her to be thus exposed?

Some said he had not dared to do otherwise; others insinuated that, since he had acted so contrary to his expressed opinions, it was because the trial would confound those who had brought it about, and that he hoped for an acquittal the more splendid because the accusation had been undeserved.

It is, therefore, easy to understand that curiosity was at its height, and that all the seats

were occupied by ten o'clock, although the hearing would not commence till eleven. Mesdames Lachaussée and Babou, more arrogant and vulgar than usual in their fine clothes, were the first to arrive.

The usher of the court, doubtless by order, had given them the best places in the front row, as near as possible to the prisoners. They were anxious to lose nothing of the anguish of that foreign woman, who, for two years, had crushed them with her youth, beauty, splendour, and her generosity to the poor. Their friends, animated by the same feelings, soon appeared, exchanging smiles and little wavings of hands, as if they were meeting at a pleasant party. Now and then some of them would shake their heads, raising their eyes heavenward, as though they would say: "Oh, what a dreadful affair! but it was to be expected it would end so!"

Other women came, but evidently in a different frame of mind. These were ladies of the best society, who had remained faithful to Rhea, not believing in her guilt, and thinking that their presence and their sympathetic looks would give her courage. Among these ladies were the pretty Madame Mortier, who had played the part of Louise, at the Malle, in

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"Frou-Frou;" and the charming Madame Langerol, the wife of the kind and courageous advocate of Rhea.

Then, scattered about among the audience, were many friends of Felix Barthey—the Prince de Linar, the painter Robert Blaise, the sculptors David and Thirion—Parisian celebrities and honourable men, who could not hide their indignation and their contempt for the foolish zeal of those who had transformed into a poisoner the honest gentleman whom they knew to be incapable of a bad thought.

Finally, on the platform, were the authorities of the department—the Prefect, who had taken no part in the affair, as he and his wife had often been Madame Deblain's guests, and who, in his *private* capacity, did not believe in her guilt; the Mayor of Vermel, a pretentious kind of fellow; General Sauvière, who had had Felix Barthey under his command during the war; and, finally, MM. Duret and Babou, who were seated to the right of the judge.

During this time, Rhea and Felix were waiting, with their friends, in a comfortable room, which, by M. Marnière's orders, had been prepared for them; the two policemen who had charge of the prisoners keeping at a respectful distance from them.



Rhea was sadly changed. Notwithstanding all her energy of character—all the sympathy which was manifested on her behalf—notwithstanding the presence of those she loved, the calmness of her conscience, and the confidence she felt in the goodness of her cause, these three months of solitary confinement had almost broken her health and spirit.

Her complexion was no longer brilliant, as it used to be; and her lips quivered nervously. Her eyes, surrounded by black circles, seemed unnaturally large and wore a feverish, anxious look. Her splendid beauty had disappeared, but she now looked, perhaps, even more lovely, with the paleness and resignation of a martyr and a victim; as, indeed, she well might; for to her the days had been long, and the sleepless nights horrible, in the loneliness of her cell; and even now, at this supreme moment, certain thoughts which had haunted her in her isolation would return to her. Above all, she could not comprehend the conduct of Dr. Plemen—that she should owe to him, who had professed love for her, the accusation of being a poisoner! And he had only been twice to see her; he had only written to her a few lines of commonplace consolation, since the day when he had sent her the terrible letter which informed her that her

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husband had died a violent death. Could it be that he believed her guilty?

Ah, how she reproached herself now for her coquetries with him! In her feminine pride, this recollection caused her deep remorse and humiliation.

Now, however, she was surrounded by friends: her father, her sister, her counsel, M. Langerol, and her uncle Jonathan, whose affection, though sometimes manifested in a ridiculous manner, was none the less sincere. She knew also that all the best society of the town felt a kindly interest in her—and yet she trembled.

As to Felix Barthey, since his first appearance before M. Babou and his spirited reply to that gentleman, he had never felt either anger or discouragement; only now and then he could not help feeling painfully oppressed at the thought of what poor Rhea must be undergoing.

He was ignorant of the grounds on which the charges against her rested; and as soon as Rhea could communicate with him, she had made him promise not to answer any questions that might be addressed to him concerning her visits to the Malle, at the time of her husband's death.

On meeting Madame Deblain in the room which M. Marnière had assigned to the accused, Felix had hastened to her to kiss her hand, and

this little act of homage had comforted poor Rhea. The artist exchanged a smiling glance with Madame Gould-Parker, then he sat down beside his brother and his counsel, just as the door opened to admit William Witson—or rather Dr. Maxwell, since he had now given up his incognito.

The face of the American, generally so grave and impenetrable, now expressed intense satisfaction and wore an air of pride; everything in his voice, his walk, betrayed deep joy and a most profound conviction.

"Well, the great time has come, my dear little countrywoman," said he to Rhea, as he kissed her cheek. "I ask nothing of you but calmness; all rests on me and your counsel. I am convinced that in a very few hours you will be free."

"Yes, have courage, my girl, have courage!" said Mr. Panton, kissing his daughter more tenderly than he had ever done; "prove to all these people that American women have strength of mind, and do not let them see you tremble."

"You are right, father," said Rhea, starting up, with an energetic look in her worn face. "I am ashamed not to have followed the good example set me by Monsieur Barthey. They think me a poisoner, do they? Well, we will prove

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“ Praised be God !” said Uncle Jonathan. “ Last night the eyes of my inner man were opened ; I saw truth victorious over falsehood, and—— ”

Here the reverend gentleman was interrupted by a nasal voice at the door of the room :

“ The accused are ordered to enter the court ! ”

Rhea again kissed her father and sister ; then with firm step, escorted by a policeman, and followed by Felix Barthey, she passed through the door to the bar—that species of pillory where, innocent or guilty, all unfortunate prisoners appear before justice.

M. de la Marnière had just then pronounced the usual formula :

“ The court is opened. Bring in the accused.”

## CHAPTER XI

### BEFORE THE JURY

WHEN the policeman opened the door leading to the compartment of the court assigned to prisoners, which was right opposite the large windows, Madame Deblain stopped suddenly, for this door seemed to her like a frame in which she, as a picture, would be placed, for all eyes to fix themselves upon her. Her strength so failed her at this point that she unconsciously placed her hand on the arm of the policeman, who, seeing her hesitate, had come close to her.

This weakness, however, lasted but a moment. On hearing M. Barthey whisper, "Courage!" she drew herself up, and, with a firm step, passed the horrid threshold.

But on entering the court, where the rays of the sun, which had just emerged from a cloud, fell on her face, as if scornfully to salute her on entering this place of infamy—at the sight of the oaken barrier which separated her from the

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crowd who were all eagerly gazing at her, she turned deadly pale, put her hands to her face, and fell back into one of the seats which were there.

There was a general movement in the audience of pity, at the sight of this young widow wearing deep mourning for the husband she was accused of poisoning. Then shouts of "Sit down! Sit down!" were addressed to some women, Mesdames Lachaussée and Babou among others, who had risen, the better to gloat over poor Rhea's misery.

From the advocates' bench, where he had taken his place beside MM. Langerol and Leblanc, William Witson hastened to the balustrade against which Madame Deblain was leaning.

He said a few words to her in a low voice, which caused Rhea to raise her head, and thenceforward he saw no expression in her face but courage and energy, tempered, it is true, by the two months of torture she had undergone.

Felix Barthey, after having bowed to the court, nodded to his friends; and, feeling reassured concerning Rhea, he sat down at the farther end of the bench from her. The two policemen were about to place themselves between the prisoners, when the judge said to them :

"Stand at the back."

The men obeyed, placing the chairs against the wall.

At the reiterated appeals of the usher of the court, silence was obtained. Then the names of the jury were called over, and the prisoners' friends took their places on the benches which had been reserved for them.

When the jury were in their places, M. Marnière gave them the usual charge concerning their duties; and then he addressed to the accused the customary questions concerning their identity. He had addressed Rhea as "Madame," and had not spoken Barthey's name with the prefix "accused."

Madame Deblain was in such a weak state that M. Langerol took her hand. She then rose and said, in a broken voice:

"Marie Rhea Panton, widow of Raymond Deblain, born in Philadelphia in 1862." Then, pale as death, she sank back in her seat.

The artist rose, with head erect, and with simple firmness replied:

"Raoul Felix Barthey, born at Lyons in 1848; artist, residing in Paris, Rue d'Offémont; a soldier, who won a military decoration during the siege of Paris."

This statement was followed by a sympa-

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thetic murmur from the crowd, and General Sauvière was heard angrily growling:

"Yes, and he did not get his medal for nothing—the brave lad!"

"Pay strict attention to what you are about to hear," said the judge to the accused.

At his order the clerk began, in the midst of profound silence, the reading of the act of accusation.

Had this document been really the work of M. Lachaussée? It is more than probable that he had called in the aid of his usual fellow-workers, MM. Duret and Babou, for it was a plain, clear statement, without bombastic phrases or needless details; of the facts elicited by the investigation; from the time of M. Deblain's death to the proofs gathered of the causes of that violent death, and the proofs which had been found against those guilty of the crime. The document was terminated in the following words: "Consequently, Marie Rhea Panton, widow of Raymond Deblain, and Felix Barthey, are accused of having administered to Raymond Deblain a poison which caused his death, and this with aggravating circumstances of premeditation."

"That is the crime of which you are accused," said the judge. "You will now hear the evidence that is brought against you."



The witnesses were then called, most of whom were Deblain's servants.

Madame Dusortois, who, before M. Babou, had brought such serious charges, had petitioned not to be obliged to give her evidence in person, in consequence of her near connection with the accused ; the judge granted this request, but with some hesitation. Her written deposition would be read. M. Marnière had also decided that Mr. Panton and the Rev. Jonathan need not be called ; and this was rather a disappointment to the latter, who had hoped to find here a favourable opportunity for airing his religious opinions.

No witness was called on behalf of Felix Barthey, to the great surprise of the chief attorney ; but M. Langerol had informed him three days before the opening of the case that he should call Dumont, Madame Deblain's coachman, and a certain Adrien Millet, an officer of the local custom-house of Vermel.

As soon as the witnesses had withdrawn from court, M. Marnière commenced his interrogatories. He began with Madame Deblain.

He said : " You know of what you are accused. You refused to answer before the investigating judge. Perhaps you thought that the law in France was the same as it is in your own country, where prisoners are never questioned.

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Is it your intention to be equally silent now that you are before a jury? You have a right to do so if you choose. If it is painful to you to stand, you may remain seated."

Poor Rhea, who had grown a little calmer, bowed her thanks to the judge for this mark of kindness; and, after a few moments' thought, replied:

"I am ready to give all necessary explanations of such of my actions as justice requires. If I acted differently before the investigating judge, it was because, from the moment I appeared before him, he talked to me as if he was quite sure of my criminality. Now I swear, by my eternal salvation, that, if my husband was poisoned, Monsieur Felix Barthey and I had no hand in that abominable crime."

"You knew, did you not, that Monsieur Deblain had made a will by which he left you all his fortune?"

"He himself told me so, and I could not doubt it, because of his love for me. It was six months after our marriage that he told me of it, and at that time I had hopes of becoming a mother; consequently, I considered this will made in favour of the children I might have. I made but one remark on the subject to my husband; it was to remind him that I was

myself heiress to a large fortune, and that therefore he need not quite forget his aunt and cousins in making his will."

"It was, doubtless, in consequence of this remark of yours that Monsieur Deblain added a codicil to his will, which gave to Madame Dusortois a life-interest in a certain sum, and to each of her daughters a portion of a hundred thousand francs."

"I do not know if he did that because of what I said; he was fond of his aunt and cousins, and perhaps would have remembered them if I had said nothing."

"Your husband had also effected a life insurance for two hundred thousand francs; were you aware of that?"

"I knew nothing of it till a year after the policy was signed; I was not surprised at it, because in my country such acts of prudence are common with the heads of families—even those who are poor."

"On this subject, I may be permitted to remark to the court," said Madame Deblain's counsel, "that the insurance company are so convinced of my client's innocence, that they do not take sides against her!"

"That argument can be used in your address for the defence, Monsieur Langerol," observed the judge. M. de la Marnière continued:

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"It was in consequence of the large amounts left to you by Monsieur Deblain's will that you are suspected of causing your husband's death. You know what are the charges brought against you ; but still I must go over them in order that you may make what explanations you think proper. I shall say nothing of the singular circumstances under which you became the wife of Monsieur Deblain, because we have nothing to do with criticizing American manners ; but when it was known at Vermel, in France, where marriages are solemnized before the law, and blessed by religion, whatever be the sect to which people belong, your marriage gave rise to malevolent remarks. Then, when it was observed that you drew your husband into a life of dissipation and expense, which is contrary to our customs, people drew from it conclusions derogatory to your character as a wife."

"I had a very sincere affection for Monsieur Deblain, and I knew that both he and I were rich. He seemed to take pleasure in all our gaieties ; our expenses were always well within our income ; I have never ceased to honour the name of the French gentleman who was my husband."

Rhea said these last words with such energy that a murmur of sympathy greeted them.

"I come now to the accusation itself. Mon-

sieur Deblain's health had always been good until the end of last winter. His friend, the learned Dr. Plemen, was treating him then for some nervous malady of the stomach. When the patient suffered from sleeplessness, and from neuralgic pains, the doctor gave him opiates and skin injections of morphine. Was that the only medical treatment your husband underwent?"

"I think so, but I do not know it for certain. Monsieur Deblain did not like me to trouble myself about his health. He was very much averse to having his health discussed by anybody; and, as Dr. Plemen told me it was not at all a serious ailment, I felt no anxiety about him."

"Did not your husband's state of health seem to get much worse, as the electoral campaign in which he was engaged grew more exciting and more undecided in his favour?"

"He certainly had grown much more nervous and irritable, and I must admit that, on this subject, I do not hold myself blameless, because it was I who excited the ambition of Monsieur Deblain, instead of letting him live the tranquil life to which he had always been accustomed."

As Rhea said this, her eyes were filled with tears.

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"In the evening of the 22nd of September," M. Marnière continued, "did not Monsieur Deblain seem to you worse than he had hitherto been?"

"He had made a long speech at a public meeting," Rhea replied, "and after dinner, although he had eaten with very good appetite, he complained of violent pains in the stomach and head. We had no one with us but Dr. Plemen, who said my husband was rather feverish, and advised him to go to bed early."

"He also ordered him to take a double dose of chloral, and to inject morphine; now, was Monsieur Deblain in the constant habit of taking these things?"

"No; on the contrary, he took them very rarely. Besides, the doctor assured me that the preparation of morphine was very weak and could do no harm."

"Yes; that fact was brought out by the investigation, when Dr. Plemen's prescriptions were examined. That evening, then, M. Deblain went up to his room earlier than usual?"

"Yes; it was hardly ten o'clock. After saying good-night to his friend and me, he retired with his valet."

"What did you then do?"

"I remained a good while in the drawing-

room with Monsieur Plemen ; then, after he left me, I went to my room."

"And you did not pass through your husband's room?"

"No, Monsieur ; for, as I have already said, Monsieur Deblain did not like any one to make a fuss about his health. I thought I should annoy him by going into his room. Besides, I had a right to suppose that he was asleep, since he had certainly followed the advice of his doctor."

"On that evening your maid Pauline did not attend to you as usual?"

"No ; she was not well, and I sent her to bed immediately after dinner."

"You must see how much the isolation of that evening strengthens the accusation against you. No one can tell where you were, nor what you did, after the departure of Dr. Plemen. On the one side, your husband's valet leaves him at eleven o'clock, and does not return to him ; on the other, your maid sees nothing of you from ten at night till the next morning. Were the doors of the two dressing-rooms usually closed ? I mean, were they locked or bolted ?"

"No ; they were never fastened, so that Monsieur Deblain or I could pass from one room to the other when we chose."

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tember, you could have gone into your husband's room?"

"I *could* have done so; but, alas! I did not."

"Are you aware that it has been proved by an experiment that, from your room, cries uttered in Monsieur Deblain's room can be distinctly heard, even when the doors are all closed?"

"I believe it; and I feel sure I should have heard these cries if my husband had uttered them. Besides, I always left the door of my dressing-room open, and I have no doubt Monsieur Deblain did the same, so that there would be but one door between us."

"And no noise, no sound of complaint, reached you?"

"Oh, if I had heard the slightest thing, should not I have flown to his aid?"

"Monsieur Deblain died poisoned by a salt called arseniate of copper, and that violent poison was furnished to you, according to the indictment, by the man who appears here as the accomplice of the crime of which you are accused. This complicity is shown by a correspondence seized in your bedroom at the Malle, in the secret drawer of a cabinet. These letters leave no doubt as to the nature of the relations existing between the man who wrote



them and the woman who received them. I shall not read any of these letters ; but I must remind you that, in the midst of expressions of ardent passion, there are, frequently repeated, thoughts betraying the desire of the lover to see his mistress free, that they may live together in Paris, in scenes more worthy of her beauty. The writer curses the legal ties which bind the woman he loves to another. That *other* is ambitious ; whilst he has but one ambition—to be always loved by her. By a singular precaution, but which is explained by the danger to which it would have exposed you, your name is never mentioned in these compromising letters. You are designated by terms of adoration which are only too easy to understand. What explanations can you give regarding this correspondence, which you so carefully kept, as women seem always to keep, letters which, if found, must ruin them ?”

Madame Deblain made no answer. She looked very pale, and more agitated than she did at the beginning of her examination. She held down her head, and it was plain that many different feelings were struggling within her.

The audience, who were anxiously awaiting this scandalous point of the evidence, began to utter murmurs of disapprobation, for the silence

of the accused seemed like a confession. When Rhea again looked up, and, following the advice which M. Langerol had doubtless just given her, she replied :

"Those letters were never addressed to me. They were confided to my care."

"The gentlemen of the jury," said M. de la Marnière, "will not be able to accept that explanation, unless you make known the name of the person who confided those letters to your care."

"I neither can nor will utter that name."

"Take care! Your refusal may be interpreted in a manner dangerous to your cause."

"It shall happen to me as God pleases; but I will never betray a secret which is not mine."

Rhea had regained all her energy as she said these words; and, as if she had foreseen the kind of reception they would meet with among the audience, she was not the least affected by anything they said or did.

Some loudly applauded her conduct, saying it was a new proof of her honesty and of her scorn of the accusations brought against her. According to others, her guilt was evident, and she was lost. They were so busy looking at Madame Deblain, that the looks of Felix Barthey were not observed.

During Rhea's examination, his face had

remained unmoved. He had, as it were, avoided looking at her. But when she came to the explanations about the letters, he turned eagerly towards her, as if he feared on her part some act of weakness; and he answered her last words by a smile, expressing at once his admiration and his gratitude.

M. de la Marnière having by a wave of his hand intimated to Rhea that his examination was finished, she sat down, and the artist rose, thinking his turn had come. His bearing and attitude were just what they should be, and it would have been difficult to find the hero of a criminal trial who should wear a more engaging expression of countenance. It was easy to foresee that the jury would have to deal with one who would not get confused, and who would not let anything be torn from him which he chose to conceal.

M. de la Marnière began: "Like Madame Deblain, you refused to answer the investigating judge concerning the principal charges of the indictment. Is it your intention to keep silence here also?"

"No," replied the young man, in a clear, firm voice: "I put a sudden stop to my examination by Monsieur Babou, because, as soon as ever I got into his office, he began calling me a

poisoner, and that with such absolute conviction, that I thought it was of no use to make any explanations to him ; but I am ready to answer you, Monsieur, with equal deference and frankness."

"You know how serious are the things with which you are charged. You are accused of having furnished Madame Deblain with the copperas with which she poisoned her husband ; and, according to the indictment, you became her accomplice because of the guilty relations existing between you—relations proved by letters seized in the house of the woman you loved—and because you wished to rid yourself of the man who was a hindrance to you in the gratification of your guilty passion."

"First of all, I solemnly swear that between me and Madame Deblain there has never been more than friendly regard. Those unfortunate letters are indeed mine, but they were not addressed to her ; I did not even know that they were in her possession. If I had known it, I should have entreated her not to keep them ; I should have insisted on their being burnt. Of course, I—no more than Madame Deblain—will tell to whom my letters were written ; it would be cowardice on my part, and this cowardice I would not commit even if the

accusation resting on me and this lady, so irreproachable in her conduct, had much more serious bases than those on which it rests. So much for the letters, which are very compromising, I admit. As to my connivance in a crime which has no existence, or which, if it exist, was not committed by Madame Deblain, I must leave that to my advocate and friend, Monsieur Leblanc—I will but say a few words about it. I was the friend of the unfortunate man whom I am accused of having helped to poison; I had no sort of interest in his death, if there existed between me and his wife this guilty connection. But even if it did exist—and I ask pardon of Madame Deblain for even supposing it possible—if, I say, I had been loved by Madame Deblain, why should this love make of me an assassin? To make her a widow, that I might marry her? Those who reason thus are utterly ignorant of human passions, and the selfishness by which they are generally governed. What! I should be loved by a woman, young, beautiful, rich, and whose husband leaves her perfect liberty; and I, who also am rich and young, a lover of my liberty, can be supposed capable of committing a crime for the mere purpose of changing into a chain of iron the flowery links that fortune had bestowed upon me? If I had even *thought* of

acting so idiotically, it is not to a prison I should have been consigned, but to a madhouse ! Leave the thought of such crimes and their execution to poor wretches, driven on by misery and avarice, but do not accuse of murder such a man as I, whose past life and whose intelligence should be his defence—even though you should choose to remain convinced of his culpable relations with the widow of the victim.

“ The indictment also states that, in my room, was found a quantity of arseniate of copper, and that Monsieur Deblain died of poisoning by copperas. First, I would ask, did he really die of poison ? and, if so, was it of the poison in question ? I have every reason to believe that, in a few minutes, you will change your opinion on that point. But still, let us suppose that Dr. Plemen made no mistake—the prosecution immediately jumped to the conclusion that, because I had arseniate of copper in my possession, I must have given it to Madame Deblain for the purpose of poisoning her husband—nay, more, I am supposed to have bought the stuff for that express purpose. The magistrate who arrived at that conclusion forgot, I suppose, that I am a painter ; he is ignorant that many artists choose to grind certain colours which they use ; he doubtless did not know that arseniate of copper is the

basis of Veronese and Mitis greens ; and in his search he paid no attention to a dress of green silk which is, no doubt, still hanging up in one of the large wardrobes at the Malle—a dress which I was to have used to complete the portrait of Madame Deblain. That is why I sent to my usual artists' colourman for arseniate of copper. That is how, from a painter of some reputation, honoured, loved, esteemed by many friends in Paris—from a soldier rewarded on the field of battle—I have suddenly become a cowardly murderer in a provincial town. I should be ashamed any longer to continue these explanations, but I am none the less ready to answer any questions the Court may choose to put to me."

As Felix ceased there burst out, among the audience, long and loud applause. It seemed as though many there were ashamed for their town of this prosecution ; and they seemed to wish to protest against the folly of the magistrate who had accused the Parisian artist.

M. Babou saw so plainly how public opinion was tending, that he became quite pale—or rather, green—whilst his wife and Madame Lachaussée, to hide their embarrassment, pretended to whisper to each other.

A few moments later, witnesses were called,

but, as we know, they were not numerous, since the defence had summoned but one—the customs officer, Millet; M. de la Marnière having authorized Dr. Plemen and Madame Dusortois not to appear, the reading of their depositions being considered sufficient. Therefore the testimony of the witnesses was soon over, they were all servants of the Deblains. They repeated before the court what they had said to M. Babou: that nothing in the conduct of their mistress had ever awakened the least comment or suspicion.

But hope returned to poor Rhea's enemies when the clerk began reading the deposition of Madame Dusortois. We know with what firm conviction this cruel woman had expressed herself before M. Babou; and as he omitted nothing of the malevolent affirmations of this witness, and as, besides, Madame Dusortois enjoyed a high reputation for honesty and straightforwardness, her testimony caused a deep impression.

It became immediately evident that those who had been doubtful in the audience, now ranged themselves among the adversaries of Madame Deblain. They argued that it was impossible that a worthy and religious woman, like the aunt of the unfortunate Raymond, could make the slightest accusation unless she had



absolute proof. On the contrary, if her conscience had permitted her, would she not rather have kept silence altogether, were it but for the honour of her nephew's name?

Whilst this reading continued, Rhea kept her head bowed down, and could not restrain her tears. People immediately concluded that she did so because she felt she was lost.

The excitement of the audience increased at the reading of Dr. Plemen's report. Doubt seemed no longer possible; M. Deblain *must* have been poisoned.

It was known that the defence meant to bring forward an American doctor, a fellow-countryman of the accused—which was a reason for placing very little confidence in him—and that he meant to try to falsify the evidence of the eminent toxicologist. But was not this mere insolence on the part of a foreigner? To think of disputing conclusions with the learned Dr. Plemen—he must be mad!

However, when it was Dr. Maxwell's turn to speak, and there advanced to the bar this man, with his acute, intelligent face and gentlemanly bearing, every one grew silent and attentive, as though all felt some strange surprise was awaiting them.

Madame Deblain lifted up her head, and never

took her eyes off her defender; Mr. Panton, whose face was purple with indignation, seemed to grow calmer; the Reverend Jonathan devoutly murmured, "The Lord will now speak by the voice of His chosen one!" and Felix Barthey turned towards Rhea as though, with a look, he would say:

"Have courage for a little longer, for we shall soon both be avenged!"

After bowing to the court, the American doctor began in these terms, in a voice so clear and distinct that it reached every part of the room:

"Being charged by the investigating judge, Babou, with the medico-legal investigation of the cause of death of Monsieur Deblain, who had then been dead twenty days, Dr. Plemen submitted the organs he had removed from the body to chemical analysis, and came to the conclusion that the deceased had been poisoned by a salt of copper, either sulphate, acetate, or arseniate.

"Now I, who have also made a strict examination, affirm that, if these organs do contain copper, it is not present in any sufficient quantity to cause death; and, moreover, I assert that certain indications scientifically demonstrate that the body, at the moment of death,

contained less copper than it did twenty days later."

At this announcement there was a movement among the audience of astonishment and incredulity; and, the prosecution having greeted the words with ironical smiles, Maxwell fixed on these gentlemen a stern look, repeating:

"To what I have just said I pledge myself, and I will soon give proof of the truth of what I say."

Turning again to the jury, he continued:

"Allow me to call your attention, gentlemen, to one very important circumstance—one which will not be contested—namely, that Monsieur Deblain did not die by means of repeated doses—by what is called slow poisoning; because during the few weeks his illness lasted, he had no vomitings, and his health showed no signs of the morbid conditions consequent on taking preparations of copper, which are not assimilated by the system. We must, therefore, reject the hypothesis of slow poisoning, because both science and common sense show it to be impossible; and we come to the consideration of the effects of one large dose of arseniate of copper, which, according to the indictment, was the means used by the murderer. Perhaps you do not know, gentlemen of the jury, what is the nature of arseniate of copper. It is composed

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of arsenical acid and copper, and, under the form of a very fine powder of a bright green colour, is used in painting, to form what artists call Veronese Green. Pure arseniate of copper is also used in the manufacture of Scheele's Green, a very terrible poison, which, when used in the tinting of wall-papers, has often caused very serious accidents.

"Now this arseniate of copper being a violent poison, the question is, did Monsieur Deblain swallow a large dose of it? It is hardly possible, because, unless he were in a complete state of insensibility, no one could ever have induced him to swallow such a dose. To do so, he must have lost his sight and have been insensible to taste; for this poison colours any liquid of a vivid green, and the most insensible palate would turn in disgust from its sickening flavour. But let us admit for a moment that Monsieur Deblain, stupefied by an anæsthetic, did drink this poisoned liquid; would not the stomach have rejected at least a part of it? Would he not have felt dreadful pains, and, as it were *galvanized* by his sufferings, would he not have awakened sufficiently to attempt to rise and call for help? Now, nothing of the kind took place. The victim of this supposed poisoning uttered no cry, was found with his bed not the least disordered, and showing no

traces in his face of a severe struggle with death. Monsieur Deblain seemed, on the contrary, to have met death during his sleep; and neither about him nor about his bed was there anything to awaken the least suspicion in the mind of Dr. Magnier, who was called in a few hours later.

"I pass now to the autopsy and the chemical analysis of the organs, and there I find myself in the midst of the most inexplicable contradictions. In the viscera and the various parts of the body which I have subjected to minute analysis, I found, it is true, some appreciable traces of copper, but in such small proportions that they could not have caused death; and nowhere did I find traces of corrosive action such as copper would have caused. Again, had the organs been saturated with copper, and still more with a compound of arsenic and copper, it is scientifically proved that they would have been in a good state of preservation; whereas they were delivered to me in such a state of decomposition that the simplest and most superficial examination would have shown the impossibility of poisoning by arseniate of copper.

"To sum up, then: I found in different parts of the body in question a large proportion of alkaloids, ptomaines—animal alkaloids which must not be confounded with vegetable alka-

loids. Now, if Monsieur Deblain had been poisoned by copper, which is a powerful antiseptic, this would have opposed the development of these animal alkaloids, the more especially as, by the testimony of the doctors, Plemen and Magnier, the deceased died suddenly, and showed no symptoms of any infectious malady.

"It will be the duty of Monsieur Leblanc, Monsieur Barthey's counsel, to ask why arseniate of copper was fixed upon by the prosecution, rather than another compound of that metal which is more frequently met with in criminal statistics, because it is so easily procured; but, for my part, I demand that the court order a third examination of the body to be made by one of the sworn experts of Paris; and I cannot help expressing my surprise that the investigating judge, contrary to all rule in such matters, should have allowed the chemical analysis to be made by the same man who performed the autopsy. To this I know what the public prosecutor will reply. He will tell you that he did so because Dr. Plemen is one of the most learned toxicologists of the day, and that his report must needs be unimpeachable. Well, notwithstanding his infallibility, I again affirm that your learned doctor has made a mistake; and, what is most strange and incomprehensible is, that he has committed an enormous blunder;

and that the only thing to be admired in his report is the skill with which he has dissimulated his errors—errors such as a student in his first year would hardly have committed. It was not merely a chemical analysis, but also a physiological examination, that should have been made to ascertain the cause of Monsieur Deblain's death; and this Dr. Plemen neglected. Therefore, I insist on a third examination being made, and, above all, I demand that Dr. Plemen shall give his evidence here before the jury. I feel sure that when my eminent colleague knows on what grounds I oppose his medical report, he will come here to defend it, whatever may be his dislike to appear in an affair touching the death of his friend, and whatever may be the present state of his health."

Having said these last words with great decision, Maxwell again bowed to the court and the jury, and resumed his seat, where he was warmly greeted by MM. Langerol and Leblanc, and received grateful glances from Rhea and Felix.

It was evident that in the crowd there was again a complete change of opinion, for when the American had ceased speaking they burst into loud applause.

As to Mr. Panton and the Reverend Jonathan, nothing but the fear of being expelled from the court kept them from uttering wild hurrahs!

There was again silence, however, when M. de la Marnière asked Madame Deblain's counsel if he did not mean to summon two witnesses named Dumont and Millet?

"Yes," replied M. Langerol, "but if the court is to be adjourned, we beg not to call these witnesses till the trial be resumed; because we may not find it necessary to call them, and so shall not take up the time of the court. We also join Dr. Maxwell in urgently demanding the appearance of Dr. Plemen, which we consider of the utmost importance."

"We have not the right to compel Dr. Plemen's attendance," replied M. de la Marnière, "but we will exert our influence to induce him to appear, and we will hear him at the re-opening of the court. The hearing is suspended for half an hour."

A few moments later Rhea and Felix were again surrounded by their friends, in the room assigned to them by the presiding judge.

Jenny, who had not been in court, clasped her sister in her arms, and again Rhea whispered to her:

"Be comforted, my darling Jenny; I shall soon have my revenge now!"

As to Dr. Maxwell, after having exchanged a few words with MM. Langerol and Leblanc, he disappeared.



## CHAPTER XII

### BETWEEN DOCTORS

HAVING passed through the large waiting-room, where the crowd were talking over the events of the trial, Maxwell left the Palais de Justice, jumped into a cab, giving to the driver the address of Dr. Plemen; and in five minutes he was at his house. On ringing, the door was immediately opened to him; he gave his card to the servant, telling him to take it to his master.

"My master is ill, and sees no one," said the servant.

"I know that he is ill," said Maxwell, "but I have a most important communication to make to him, and I have no doubt he will make an exception in my favour."

The servant no longer hesitated; he supposed this doctor had come for some important consultation, and he knew that his master never allowed anything to stand in the way of those who needed his help; he therefore showed Maxwell

into a large drawing-room, and went into his master's study.

The room in which Maxwell stood looked into the garden ; from the window he could see the little door in the wall which placed the doctor's house in communication with that of the Deblairs'. He had been waiting impatiently for some minutes, when the servant returned, and asked him to go into the study ; on passing into the room where his colleague was awaiting him, he could hardly repress an exclamation of astonishment. He almost failed to recognize Eric Plemen in the emaciated, pale creature, with feverish eyes, who was standing by the writing-table, resting his hands on the back of a chair, as though he feared his strength would fail him. He was, indeed, fearfully changed ; in one month he seemed to have grown ten years older—his eyes were hollow, his features drawn, his cheek-bones prominent.

On seeing the surprise which his appearance caused to his visitor, he said in a hollow voice:

" Yes, it is I ; I, myself, however difficult it may be to recognize me. I have been expecting you ; only one thing surprises me—that you did not come sooner."

" You know then, Monsieur, what brings me here ? "

"Of course I do, since I have just told you I was expecting you. Still I would rather hear what you have to say ;" and, motioning to him to take a chair, he himself sat down, heavily.

After a few moments' thought, Maxwell said :

"My reason, Monsieur, for not coming to you sooner was that I hoped this visit would not be needed. I thought that the imputation brought against Madame Deblain would be ended by her acquittal. You know that, on the contrary, she was sent for trial, as well as the young man who is accused of being her accomplice. The trial is going on now, and notwithstanding the numerous proofs of the innocence of Madame Deblain, she may yet be condemned ; her condemnation, of course, bringing with it that of Monsieur Felix Barthey. If even they are acquitted, there will always remain a doubt in the minds of suspicious people, because, when a crime has been committed, public opinion always fixes on some one as the culprit ; and even though the person accused may escape punishment, he remains none the less branded in public opinion, unless the real criminal be discovered. I think you understand me ?"

"Pray go on," said Plemen.

"You alone can save Madame Deblain. You well know that this unfortunate woman, whom

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you loved, did not poison her husband. Your friend did not die of poisoning by verdigris; because the copper found by both you and me in the organs we analysed was not there in sufficient quantity to cause death. As to arsenic, neither you nor I found any more than usually exists in a human body; therefore there was no poisoning by copper nor by arsenic. The proof of this is that when you made the post-mortem examination the body was in an advanced state of decomposition, as I myself saw it three weeks later, and it contained numerous traces of animal alkaloids, which you know cannot be produced in a body saturated with arsenic and copper, because they would preserve it for a long time from decomposition. And yet this body did contain copper, since you found it there as well as I. But was it present *before* death? You alone can tell me that. As to me, I assert that, while he lived, Monsieur Deblain had no more copper in his system than may be met with in any human body in its normal condition."

Until then Dr. Plemen had remained motionless and with downcast eyes. But at these last words he started, and fixed his eyes questioningly on Maxwell, as if begging him to continue.

Maxwell resumed: "Monsieur Deblain, notwithstanding all this, did die of poison; but what was the nature of that poison? You, yourself, have put me on the track of making that discovery."

Eric could not suppress a start of surprise.

"On the 23rd of September you read, before the Paris Academy of Medicine, a complete and learned treatise on ptomaines and anæsthetics. I have obtained a copy of this work, and I find that you demonstrate the condition in which these animal alkaloids are formed; their toxicological properties, and the means for discovering them in bodies in which they were not naturally formed, but on which they have acted as a poison, by being absorbed during life. You also add, that a few drops of a solution of these ptomaines may cause instantaneous and painless death, acting, as certain vegetable poisons do—curare, for instance—by bringing on paralysis of the heart. You further say, that death would be still more rapid and certain if the poison were administered by hypodermic injection. Now, when Dr. Magnier was called in, on the morning of the 23rd of September, he found no marks of suffering on the face of Monsieur Deblain, who had been dead many hours. The instrument,

which the patient used himself sometimes for a skin-injection of morphine, was not found. The unfortunate man did not struggle, did not call for help; consequently his wife, whose room is contiguous to his, could not be awakened by his groans or cries."

"Perhaps Madame Deblain was not at home that night," said Plemen, as though in spite of himself.

"I know that she was at the Malle; I know that she received a summons from her sister, who was ill; and that you left the town with her about ten o'clock. *You* returned soon after midnight, but Madame Deblain did not come back till the morning. All this is affirmed by witnesses, but as these witnesses are with one exception, Madame Deblain's servants, it may be that the jury will not credit their evidence. The defence, therefore, do not wish to rebut the accusation by means of an *alibi*; they desire to have indisputable proof of the innocence of the woman. This innocence I have proved scientifically, by demonstrating that Monsieur Deblain could not have been poisoned by copper or arsenic. But I now call upon you for that further proof of her innocence by naming the guilty person. I am certain this person is known to you, because

the medico-legal report, furnished by you, was drawn up with the obvious intention of misleading the authorities. A man of your learning could not possibly have made such a report by mistake. Am I not right, Dr. Plemen, in saying that you, the author of that scientific report read by you in Paris, could not be mistaken?"

"Yes; you are quite right. It is all true," replied Plemen, in a harsh voice, as he rose from his chair.

His face wore an expression of savage energy.

"Who, then, is the criminal?" asked Maxwell.

"You may well suppose that I shall not hide from you his name, since I have allowed you to go on talking, and you are still standing there *alive* before me! You know I was expecting you, and that I might have ridded myself of you by blowing out your brains!"

The American only answered these words by a smile.

"Ah, you are brave," said Plemen. "You came fearlessly, and you did right. You do not suppose I would have allowed Madame Deblain to be sentenced to death; or that, if she had been, I would not have freed her, and

cleared her name of all stain. But I kept waiting, like a coward, hoping that circumstances would prove her innocence and bring her accusers to shame. Yes; you are right. Not a shadow of suspicion must rest upon her. Now, heed me well—for, horrible as it is, I will tell you all. Indeed, this dreadful secret has too long oppressed me."

Calmly Maxwell stood, leaning against the bookcase, while the doctor went on with his confession.

"Madame Deblain had hardly been six months in Vermel before I loved her madly, but I thought I should have strength to stifle this passion—doubly guilty in me, since her husband was my friend; vainly, however, I struggled; vainly I sought refuge in work, and shut myself up at home. By a dreadful fatality, it was Raymond himself who drew me to his house; it was his wife who reproached me with my unfriendly neglect of them. I resisted for a whole year; but the day when I thought she loved Felix Barthey, and that she was his—from that day I began to hope that she might be mine; I became jealous, and I sought her then with as much ardour as I had hitherto fled from her. She had once said to me: 'If, as a young girl, and unengaged, I had met you, no man but



you could ever have touched my heart.' I interpreted these words as an admission of regard for me; and then I began to hate Raymond, whom I had loved as my brother, but whom I now looked on as the obstacle which separated me from her. Ah! I will not try to paint to you the tortures I owed to this dreadful passion. Rhea asked me to sacrifice, to her husband, my political ambition; and I did it at a word, thinking that, at that price, I should buy her love. But she was not the woman to sell herself; and day by day I saw more clearly that she was not the woman to give herself to a lover either.

"My existence became a torment to me; Deblain seemed to me as a robber who had stolen my happiness! Rhea had been created for me, and not for him! She should be mine alone! I praised Raymond to the electors; and, seeing how inferior in intelligence he was to me, I blamed *him* instead of myself for the shameful and cowardly bargain I had made, in giving up my place to him. I hated *him* for depriving me of that position in the political world, by the help of which I should have risen so high, that Rhea would have been proud to belong to me.

"How often have I crept through the door in the garden wall which divides the two houses,

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and glided unseen to be near the enchantress ; with the firm intention of obtaining by force what she refused to my mad passion. One night, when I knew Raymond was in Paris, I went as far as the door of her room ; but I dared not cross its threshold. Ah, I had better have gone on ! Either she would have been mine, or I should have been driven away as a coward and a brute ; but I should not have become a murderer ! You know, it was I who poisoned Raymond ! ”

“ I knew it,” replied Maxwell ; who, in spite of his strong will, could not conceal the emotion this strange story caused him.

“ Well, now, let me tell you how it all happened. Perhaps you will see that there were extenuating circumstances in my crime. I have just told you how I loved that woman, to whom I had sacrificed my political ambition ; that enchantress whom I sometimes fancied was ready to fall into my arms, but who always escaped me, yet without ceasing to intoxicate me with her coquetries and her smiles ! To my fevered heart and brain I said that she was not mine because I had not dared to take her !

“ It was in this state of delirium that she found me on the evening of the 22nd of September, when she begged me to go with

her immediately to the Malle, whence had come a messenger to tell her that her sister was seriously ill. Raymond, not feeling well, had gone up to his room. At ten o'clock, his wife and I set out. It was a very dark night, and she was close to me in the carriage. I took her in my arms, and my lips sought hers, but she repulsed me with a vigour of which I should not have thought her capable, and in accents at once threatening and tender, she said: 'Pray leave me alone. Think only of my poor Jenny, whose life is, perhaps, in danger; think, too, of Raymond, who also is ill, and who trusts his wife to you, his friend! Have courage, and let us not be cowardly, guilty creatures!' 'But will you never love me, then?' I asked. 'Who knows?' said she, in a tone that maddened me. Was she sincere, or was it fear of me that made her speak so? No matter now! She had the power to conquer me; and, when we arrived at the Malle, her hand was still clasped in mine, but I dared not say to her another word.

"Madame Gould-Parker's illness was severe; it was time for me to be there; but I need not go into any particulars about that; for in two hours she was out of danger, and Rhea said to me as she went with me to the carriage which was to take me back to the town: 'You have saved

Jenny's life; I shall never forget it—never!’ She did not return to Vermel with me, because her sister had begged her to stay with her. I returned alone in that carriage, full of my thoughts and recollections of her; and when I got home, I seemed quite mad. What happened then? I have difficulty in remembering! And yet I must recall it, for I must tell it to you!

“I entered my house by a door which opens into a deserted alley. I passed through my garden, and I saw the little gate in the wall. Why did I pass through it? How was it I found myself, a few moments after, in Rhea's bedroom, to which I had crept, like a thief, in the silence and darkness of night! No, not like a thief—like a lover who is expected; for a lamp with a rose-coloured shade was burning, and I could fancy I saw her lying asleep on her bed! Just then I heard a slight groan. I stopped, terror-stricken, for these sounds proceeded from Raymond's room. My first impulse was to escape by the way which I had come; but instead of that, as if in spite of myself, I went towards the dressing-rooms, and passed through them to the bedside of my friend. My friend! He had his eyes open, and he recognized me immediately, without seeming surprised at seeing me there. ‘I am in terrible

pain,' said he, 'and I find I have no morphine. I was just going to ring for Pierre, and send him to a chemist's to get some.' I know not what answer I made him, or even if I spoke at all. In my haste to rejoin Madame Deblain, when she was waiting for me to go with her to the Malle, I had not taken from my coat-pocket two phials which I had brought from my laboratory at the hospital.

"One contained an anæsthetic of morphine, composed by myself, the other—ah, the other! They were both together in my pocket. I took out one, and filled the little instrument which lay on the table near the lamp. I leant over Raymond and gave him an injection in the arm he held out to me, in his desire to be released from pain. Instantly, murmuring 'Thanks,' he closed his eyes, but I uttered a cry of horror! On taking up the phial from which I had taken the liquid, I saw it was not the one containing morphine, but that terrible poison, extracted from animal alkaloids, which I had discovered, and which I was to display the next day at the Academy of Medicine!"

"Ah, it is frightful!" exclaimed Maxwell, as Plemen covered his ghastly face with trembling hands.

"Ay, indeed; it is frightful, and even more

monstrous and horrible than you think!" said Eric; "for I know not whether it was by mistake I did it, or whether my will did not drive me to poison the man whose wife I so coveted!"

"But you could have done something to save him!"

"Yes; and I did nothing! I was not sure if I were really such a wretch, and I was too cowardly to wish to know. I returned rapidly through the dressing-rooms, of which I closed the doors, and I passed swiftly through Rhea's room. Perhaps I feared to see her there, calling to me, not in tones of love, but crying aloud, 'Murderer! Poisoner!' I went into my own house, and at seven in the morning I was still standing with my forehead pressed against the window which looks into the garden, when I saw Madame Deblain pass. She had returned from the Malle. I went down quickly, and closed the gate of communication between our two houses. Half an hour later I started for Paris. You know what happened next."

"And you had the courage to make the post-mortem examination?" exclaimed Maxwell.

"How could I do otherwise? If I had refused, would not the authorities have called in some skilful chemist, who would have demonstrated that Monsieur Deblain was the victim

of a crime? I therefore accepted the horrible task, and I concluded for poisoning by copper, because the unfortunate Raymond had been using a quack medicine which I knew contained sulphate of copper, and, besides, copper is found in all bodies in their normal condition."

"In the organs I analysed there was more——"

"More copper than there should have been! That is true. It was because I feared there might be a second examination. So, when the body was given up to me, I saturated it with a solution of copper, to arrest decomposition, which was already sufficiently advanced to have caused all traces of poisoning by an animal alkaloid to disappear. Poisoning by copper might have been the result of a too free use of some medicine containing it. The death might be considered accidental. I thought the authorities would stop there, and not think of seeking for criminals where none existed. Could I ever have suspected that they would accuse that poor woman, whose hours of imprisonment have been less painful to her than my hours of liberty to me! I never reckoned for provincial scandal, for anonymous accusations, for the stupid ambition of Babou. I reckoned, also, without thinking of such learn-

ing as yours—without thinking of God's justice!"

Plemen's voice, as he said these last words, had dropped into low, grave tones; his face expressed energetic resolution; his eyes were frankly fixed on Maxwell, who could not help asking himself whether he had before him a monster or a victim of fatality.

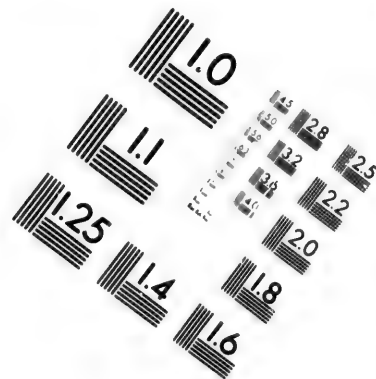
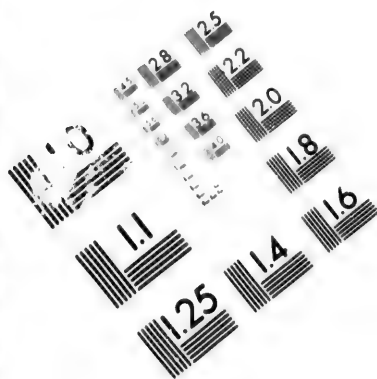
"And now, sir," said Plemen, "let justice be done! If you had not come here during the suspension of the court, I should have sent this letter. It is addressed to Monsieur de la Marnière. May I ask you to take charge of it? It contains all that the judges need know to make them sorry for having suspected her. Ask her and Monsieur Felix Barthey to forgive me. I have spoken my own sentence; and before you have left this house I shall be worthy of your pity, for I shall be dead!"

With one hand Plemen held out to Maxwell a large packet; with the other he took up a little glass instrument, with a steel needle, which lay on his writing-table.

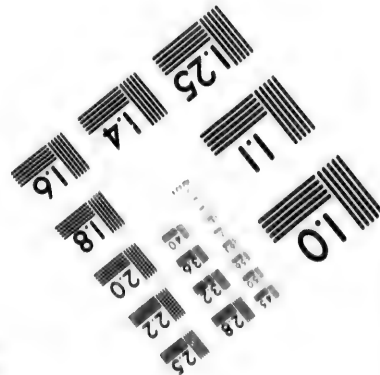
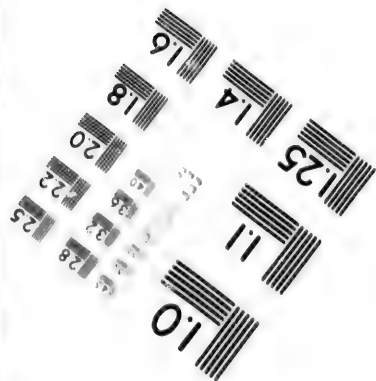
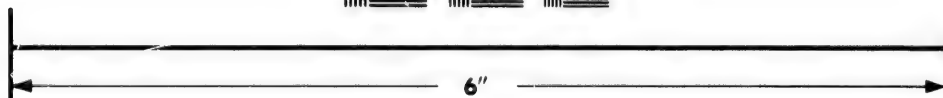
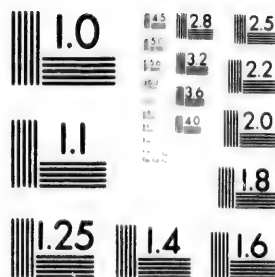
Deeply moved, the American took the letter, and, bowing, without a word, he was about to retire, when with a gesture Plemen stopped him, and said, with awful calmness:

"You know that all vegetable poisons, ex-





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cept strychnine, disappear with the decomposition of the body. The one I am about to use is more subtle. It causes no pain, and leaves no trace, unless immediate analysis be made. Remember this; and let my voluntary death enlighten medical science, since I have dishonoured it in my life. Farewell, Monsieur, farewell! Hasten back to the place where, no doubt, you are anxiously expected."

Maxwell bowed again and fled, shuddering at the sound of the closing doors of Eric Plemen's study, which shut behind him like those of a tomb.

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## CHAPTER XIII

### AN UNEXPECTED EVENT

At the moment when Maxwell was leaving Dr. Plemen's house, a touching scene was passing between the daughters of Elias Panton, in the room where the accused were awaiting the resumption of the trial.

Madame Gould-Parker, who had been called away from her sister to receive a telegram, came back after reading it, looking very pale and extremely agitated. She drew Rhea aside, saying, "Just read this!"

After looking at the paper, Rhea too appeared much moved, and said to Jenny:

"The poor colonel! But you might have expected some such news; for when men go off on such distant expeditions, they run into great dangers."

"Oh! I never have thought lately of any one but you. Your dreadful situation excluded all thought of others! Now, you shall no

longer impose silence on me! I can, and I will, speak out!"

"For what purpose?"

"Rhea, my darling sister!"

"You promised me you would keep quite clear of this odious affair; you promised me this for the sake of your love to me and our dear mother. I will not release you from your promise!"

"But it is too dreadful! Don't you *know* that, if you are condemned, I shall kill myself?"

"I shall not be condemned, and you shall live to be loved by me and all of us."

"Then do consult Monsieur Langerol."

"I shall consult nothing but my own heart; and I forbid you to say one word. Besides, you have not been called as a witness, and it is too late for you to be heard now."

"But you will let me show this telegram to your counsel, will you not?"

"I will show it to him myself, and we shall see what use he will make of it."

Leaving Jenny, Rhea went up to MM. Leblanc and Langerol, gave them the telegram to read, and exchanged with them a few words. She then returned to her sister, and said:

"It is all right. The telegram will be of

some use, and we have arranged our plan ; but you must keep quiet."

" May I not tell Monsieur Barthey ? "

" It is better not to do so now ; it would only upset him, and, perhaps, make him commit some imprudence. "

Suddenly Maxwell appeared, and his face so openly betrayed his state of mind that MM. Langerol and Leblanc could not help feeling alarmed. Where had he been, and what would they learn from him ? After a few moments' conversation with their mysterious ally, the two young men were quite satisfied, and they shook his hand warmly to express their admiration.

The usher just then announced that the court would resume the trial.

Barthey's friends then reluctantly quitted him ; Rhea kissed her father and sister ; and the two accused, having exchanged a friendly look, regained their places, and faced once more the noisy crowd, which had grown more impatient than ever.

At the first word, however, from the presiding judge, silence was obtained, and then M. de la Marnière said :

" Monsieur Langerol, the chief attorney and I have agreed to summon Dr. Plemen, in order that he may himself defend his medical report,

The doctor was not at home, but it will be easy to find him, and I do not doubt he will immediately respond to the summons of the court. Meanwhile, we will, if it suit you, hear the two witnesses for the defence whom you have summoned."

Madame Deblain's advocate replied: "One of these witnesses has been already heard. It is the coachman, Dumont; he is in court now. The other is Millet, the local customs officer: he is in the witnesses' room."

"We will take the evidence of Dumont first."

Madame Deblain's servant immediately stepped forward, and M. Langerol said:

"May I ask you to be so good as to demand first of Dumont that he tell you at what hour of the night of the 22nd of September he left Vermel; at what hour he returned to the town; and who was in the carriage he drove?"

The judge said: "Dumont, you have heard and understood these questions, no doubt. Answer them, but turn towards the jury."

The coachman obeyed, and said:

"On the 22nd of September I left the house at half-past nine or ten o'clock with Madame Deblain and Dr. Plemen, whom I drove to the Malle. I came back about one in the morning with Dr. Plemen, and then, by my mistress's

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orders, I returned to the château, where I put up the horses. At half-past six in the morning I drove Madame back to Vermel."

"Then Madame Deblain stayed all night at the Malle?"

"She must have done so, unless she walked into Vermel; for I am sure, my room being over the stables, no one could have got out the horses during the night."

"What did you think when you found that Madame Deblain stayed at the Malle instead of returning to town?"

"I only thought that Madame Gould-Parker must be very ill, since Dr. Plemen had been sent for in such a hurry; and I supposed that Madame did not like to leave her sister alone."

"Have you any other questions to address to the witness, Monsieur Langerol?" asked the judge.

"None," replied Rhea's counsel.

"Then we will hear the second witness. Usher, call for Monsieur Millet."

M. de la Marnière said to him: "You are an officer of the local custom-house?"

"I am."

"Give your evidence."

"I was on duty at the gate of the Faubourg de Mars on the 23rd of September, at six o'clock in the morning, when, about half an hour



later, a carriage came to the gate driven by the coachman Dumont, whom I have known for more than ten years. I approached the carriage, not so much as a duty as by way of joke, because I knew Madame Deblain's servants were not the least likely to try to cheat the revenue; but just as I was going to open the door of the carriage I saw some one inside, whom I immediately recognized. It was Madame Deblain, so I just bowed to her, and made a sign to Dumont to drive on."

"Are you quite certain it was Madame Deblain who was in the carriage?"

"Perfectly certain; for not only have I often seen Madame Deblain herself driving, but last year she came several times to my house with Dr. Plemen to see my wife during her last illness."

"You can now retire, unless Monsieur Langerol wish to put any further questions to you."

"No, Monsieur," said Rhea's counsel. "I merely wished to prove that my client, whose husband was said to have been poisoned at Vermel at midnight, passed all that night several miles from the house where the supposed crime was committed."

"Why was not this *alibi* brought forward sooner?"

"Because we did not believe that the accu-

sation brought against Madame Deblain and Monsieur Barthey would stand against the testimony of the witnesses ; because we did not wish to owe to an *alibi* the acquittal of which we feel sure ; we would rather that the jury should have a perfect conviction of the innocence of our clients ; and, finally, we hoped that Dr. Plemen, who has been informed of the refutation of his medical report, would come here, and either admit his error or defend himself against his learned opponent."

" Dr. Plemen will certainly appear ; but, as he is perhaps detained at this moment by his professional duties, if the chief attorney will now address us we will hear him."

M. Lachaussée, although the evidence of Dumont and Millet had troubled him a good deal, replied that he was ready.

The public manifested great satisfaction at this, and became attentive. Everybody's curiosity was intensely excited, and all were wondering how the chief attorney would get through his speech, his want of eloquence being well known. Mocking smiles were already being exchanged as M. Lachaussée arranged his notes, coughed, hemmed, rose, and placed himself in an attitude he had studied beforehand.

His speech was nothing but a repetition, without any fresh details, of the act of indictment ;

of the evidence of the witnesses, and of the report of Dr. Plemen ; besides this, all he did was to make violent attacks on the morality of the accused, and to speak of the *insolence* of the foreign doctor, who, daring to contradict the learned toxicologist of whom Vermel was so justly proud, had piled up, in his speech, a lot of technical expressions and scientific terms, with the sole intention of misleading the jury. Of course, he did not fail to read the most passionate of the letters of Felix Barthey ; and he had the satisfaction, during this reading, of finding the interest of everybody excited. This furnished him with a chance for a farther attack against Felix, whom he called a "second-rate" painter ; one who had been puffed as a hero in the late war, because, at the time when every man was ready to lay down his life for his country, he had just done his duty ! As to those witnesses Dumont and Millet, who had been called up at the last moment, there was no need to refute their testimony. No doubt Dumont had brought back the female prisoner to Vermel at seven in the morning ; no doubt Millet had recognized her. But did *that* prove that she, an excellent horsewoman, had not returned to the town alone, after the departure of Dr. Plemen from the château ? On the contrary it is probable that she had omitted nothing

in order to prepare an *alibi*, in case her system of defence should prove insufficient. If this were not so, would not Madame Deblain have been the first to proclaim her absence from home at the time when the crime was supposed to have been committed? Would she not immediately have called as witnesses those servants who were so devoted to her; Dr. Plemen, and her sister—that Madame Gould-Parker, who so opportunely was taken so seriously ill that Madame Deblain was obliged to stay with her all night? If that were true, why did she leave her at daybreak? Why did she quit that sister, who was at death's door, if it were not that she might be seen returning to Vermel? It was a clever scheme; but it was too clever, for it served to show what her motives were.

As the chief attorney perceived the effect he was producing on his audience by this line of argument, he hastened to wind up by addressing the jury in the set phrases so frequently used for the purpose:

"Gentlemen of the jury, you will not let yourselves be carried away by the eloquence of the prisoners' counsel. You will bethink you of the overwhelming evidence that you have heard, and of the indisputable proofs we have placed before you—proofs which are moral,

material, scientific—you will give a verdict in accordance with your conscience, a severe verdict, which will restore calmness to this city, that has been troubled and agitated by so monstrous a crime !”

M. Langerol next rose ; he was one of the most brilliant speakers at the bar of Vermel, and he was, besides, a clever writer and a man of some political importance. He began thus :

“Gentlemen—after you had heard all the witnesses so energetically affirm that the conduct of Madame Deblain was always irreproachable ; that she was to them the kindest mistress, and to her husband the best of wives ; after the surprisingly conclusive proofs brought before you by the learned Dr. Maxwell, who proved to you that Monsieur Deblain could not have been poisoned by any preparation of copper, and that, consequently, his wife cannot be suspected of having taken his life,—I asked myself what remained for me to say in defence of my client against a crime which she cannot possibly have committed ? Feeling assured that your minds must be quite made up, there was yet one thing I feared—the eloquence of my eminent opponent. I thought his powerful logic and his skilful deductions might build up afresh the crumbling edifice of the prosecution ; and thus compel me to rely on quite fresh arguments for

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my defence. I carefully followed every phrase of his skilful attack, preparing myself for the struggle; but now I lay down my arms, for I have no enemy to fight! I will merely remind you of what you have heard from the prosecution—nay, I specially remind you of that, for it is in accusing Madame Deblain as they have done, that they defend her more eloquently than I can do by any words of mine! Have they not, in fact, proved to demonstration that my client never failed in her duty as a wife? and yet, to the chief attorney, she still seems an adulteress! Is it not scientifically proved that Raymond Deblain was not poisoned by a salt of copper? And yet, to the chief attorney, she still seems a poisoner! At least, let my honourable opponent tell us what poison she employed? Arseniate of copper fails him, but the field of poisons is, alas, too fertile! We have to deal with an accusation whose singularity is complete; it is as if the man had been shot, and we were accused of stabbing him! An unfortunate man dies, from some unknown cause, and we are supposed to have killed him with the one kind of poison we could possibly have procured; but this poison does not exist in the organs of the defunct—at least, it does not exist in such conditions as would be possible had it been used for a criminal purpose. Finally,

the crime, if crime there were, was committed at an hour when the accused was a long way from the victim; and the chief attorney, in despair of finding reasonable arguments, is obliged to make of my client an Amazon, riding some fantastic hippogriff in the middle of the night, unseen by all, in order to come and accomplish her crime, and then disappear. Really one cannot discuss such stuff in a serious spirit, and I am ashamed to be obliged, before sensible men, to argue about such absurd fables! If Madame Deblain did not return to Vermel till seven in the morning, it was because—her sister having no further need of her—she needed rest; and if the witnesses whose depositions my eloquent opponent receives so sarcastically, said nothing on these points at an earlier part of the trial, it was merely because they were asked no questions on that special point. Besides, why should we suppose that we should have need of an *alibi* to rebut an accusation which nothing justifies, either morally or materially? Madame Deblain is an innocent woman, in every sense of the word; and it is not by invoking your pity, or raising a *possible doubt* of her guilt, that we desire to secure your verdict of acquittal; we desire it only in the name of justice and common sense."

M. Langerol had hardly said these last

words, when applause broke out, so loud as to drown the murmurs of those whose hatred seemed to increase as the probability of acquittal became more certain.

But those manifestations of sympathy with Madame Deblain's eloquent counsel were quickly hushed when M. George Leblanc rose.

There was one thing which had not been observed among the audience, but which had not escaped the notice of MM. Duret and Babou—that was, the violent emotion the chief judge had shown on reading a letter which had been brought to him by one of the ushers of the court.

For a moment it seemed as though the judge hesitated as to whether he would allow Felix Barthey's counsel to speak. He, however, decided for it, after a short consultation.

It was the first time that George Leblanc had ever been heard in Vermel, where his reputation had preceded him as a wit, and where he was known by his writings as a novelist and a politician.

"Gentlemen," said the famous counsel, "I am still more at a loss for arguments than was my friend who preceded me. He did such complete justice to these absurd accusations, that he has not left me a word to say. How can I attempt to prove to you that Monsieur Felix Barthey is not guilty in a case of poison-



ing which has never been committed? I cannot defend him from the consequences of a crime that has no existence! Let the public prosecutor show us a victim of poisoning by arseniate of copper, and I will then show him that, although my client had that substance in his possession, he was not, therefore, an assassin. We have scientific proof that Monsieur Deblain's death was not caused by the means stated. Consequently, I say to the chief attorney: 'If you believe a murder has been committed, seek some one else to accuse than the honourable and brave man who is my friend and client.'

During this speech, M. Lachaussée pretended to be looking over his papers, and M. de la Marnière seemed lost in thought. Since he had received the letter we have mentioned, his face wore a grieved expression.

M. Leblanc continued thus:

"The chief attorney seems to hold the artistic talent and the military reputation of my client in but slight esteem. I will not dispute the value of his opinions on those points; I prefer to leave that to the public—his natural judges—who, whether he paint with Veronese Green or not, are eager to buy his pictures. You cannot make a murderer of Monsieur

Felix Barthey, whom I feel assured, gentlemen of the jury, you will now send back to his studio, with full permission to use, as he pleases, that arseniate of copper which only serves him to give life to his pictures and not death to his friends."

M. de la Marnière, who still looked very grave, now asked if the chief attorney intended to make a reply. M. Lachaussée answered that he did.

"I shall allow you to speak in a few moments," said M. de la Marnière; "but first I must make known to the jury the unexpected event of which I was informed at the moment Monsieur Leblanc began his speech. Dr. Plemen will not come before the court. He died suddenly half an hour ago."

It may well be imagined what an effect this announcement produced on the audience. On all sides were heard exclamations of amazement.

"It is also my duty," pursued M. de la Marnière, "to read out publicly the declaration which has been put into my hands by Dr. Maxwell. This declaration was confided to him by Dr. Plemen himself during the suspension of the hearing. It is as follows:

"I, the undersigned, Dr. Eric Plemen, acknowledge that I was entirely wrong in the chemical analysis I made of the internal organs of Monsieur Raymond Deblain. He did not

die of poisoning by arseniate of copper ; but of a hypodermic injection of an animal alkaloid, which I administered by mistake, about one o'clock in the morning of the 23rd of September last, whilst his wife—who had gone with me to the Malle about ten o'clock the previous night—was with her sister, whom she did not leave till daylight. It was from professional pride that I concealed this horrible mistake of mine in my report. I never supposed that this deed of mine would cause two innocent persons to be brought to trial. I crave pardon of justice, of Madame Deblain, and of Monsieur Felix Barthey. As I make this declaration, I have but a few moments to live ; and if a post-mortem examination of my body be made, the same phenomena will be observed as those which caused the instantaneous death of Monsieur Deblain.'"

It would be impossible to describe the impression this declaration made on the people. They seemed struck at once with amazement and horror ; and they hardly dared to manifest their delight at the proof the monstrous judicial error that had so nearly been committed. As to the enemies of Madame Deblain, they were utterly dumbfounded, and could only hang down their heads.

M. Lachaussée, however, jumped up, and said:  
‘After what has taken place, I demand that this case be remanded till next session, so that further inquiries may be made.’

This caused a murmur of disapprobation among the audience, and M. Langerol, rising, said:

“We beg the court not to grant the request of the chief attorney.”

“The court will deliberate on the matter,” replied M. de la Marnière. And, after a few moments’ consultation, the worthy judge said:

“The court rejects the request of the chief attorney, and orders that the proceedings shall continue.”

Then M. de la Marnière resumed:

“Gentlemen of the jury, in the present state of affairs, I do not think it necessary that I should make any summing-up of the evidence. All the incidents must be quite fresh in your memories, and I shall not tell you what your duty is, because to do so would imply a doubt of your honour. I will leave it entirely to your consciences to bring in any verdict you think fit. Here is the list of questions which you must answer. While you are deliberating the court is suspended.”

No one thought of leaving the court, because

there was felt a certainty that the jury would not be absent long.

Madame Deblain and Felix Barthey alone withdrew, in conformity with the law, and in the corridor they met Madame Gould-Parker, who, while embracing her sister, cried :

"Ah, now, nothing shall hinder me from speaking out!"

And, without waiting for Rhea's reply, Jenny held out her hand to Barthey, saying :

"I have been a widow, dear friend, for more than four months. I learned it about an hour ago, by a despatch from our Minister in Paris. My husband died at Shanghai after a few days' illness. For nearly three months you and my sister have been in prison, undergoing tortures on account of a prosecution that I could have ended with a word. Will you ever forgive me for such cowardice? It was Rhea who made me keep silence!"

Felix pressed her to his heart, and only said :  
"I love thee! I love thee!"

They had all three been standing thus, hand in hand, and with tearful eyes, when suddenly they heard loud applause, and just then the usher came, politely inviting "Madame Deblain and Monsieur Barthey" to resume their places in court.

They obeyed, but hardly had they appeared before applause again burst forth, led by the loud hurrahs of Mr. Panton and the Reverend Jonathan. The ushers had some difficulty in stopping the tumult.

At last, however, silence was obtained, and M. de la Marnière said, addressing the clerk of the court :

" Make known to the accused the verdict of the jury."

" The answer of the jury is : ' Not Guilty ' on all the counts," said the clerk.

" In consequence, then, of the verdict of the jury," said the chief judge, " the court pronounces the acquittal of Madame Deblain and Monsieur Felix Barthey, and orders that they be set at liberty if there be no other charge against them."

Then, bowing with extreme politeness to the victims of M M. Lachaussée, Duret, and Babou, M. de la Marnière left the court.

There was immediately a frantic demonstration of joy among the crowd, who would not disperse, but continued to testify their delight by loud acclamations ; for never had the termination of a trial afforded such complete satisfaction to the public.

Friends, and even acquaintances, of Rhea

and Felix came round them, and affectionately pressed their hands. General Sauvière came down with all the agility of a boy to congratulate his favourite Felix.

Madame Deblain and her so-called *accomplice* were no longer held at their infamous bar by a stupid and odious accusation, but by the throng of their friends, all eager to show their respect and affection.

Rhea and Felix at last managed to get away ; but, in order to escape from a popular ovation, they were obliged to leave the prison by a back-door. This manœuvre, however, did not entirely defeat the crowd, for they came round the Golden Lion, and stayed till past midnight, uttering loud cries.

Madame Deblain and her father could hardly restrain the Reverend Jonathan from appearing on the balcony to address the crowd—he thought it would be such an excellent opportunity for preaching *the truth*.

The next day, before noon, more than two thousand persons had called and left cards at the hotel ; and when Dr. Maxwell went to the railway station, on his way to Paris, he was recognized and received with loud applause.

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## EPILOGUE

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### WILLIAM WITSON'S SECRET

THE train which bore away Witson—for, having played out his part, *Dr. Maxwell* had ceased to exist—had hardly left the station at Vermel, when the expression of his face changed completely. The cheerful looks he wore, as his friends wished him good-by, disappeared, and gave place to that anxious, sombre look, which to Jane, his adopted daughter, was so unaccountable. It seemed as though a mask had suddenly fallen from his face; for as he sat, shrunk up in one of the corners of the carriage, he thought no more of what he had done to save his countrywoman. He gave himself up entirely to thoughts of that mysterious past which, for many years, had caused him to lead so strange a life—which had made him, in France and in



America, the auxiliary of the law when it vainly sought some guilty person, or its adversary when the innocent were accused.

For some time he remained motionless, plunged in deep thought. Then suddenly, as if he had come to some final conclusion, he exclaimed :

"Well, I have kept my oath and done my duty. Now, God's will be done! This very evening she shall know all, and to-morrow I shall be the most miserable or the happiest of men!"

That evening Witson arrived in Paris where he was expected by Jane, to whom he had sent a telegram. On hearing the carriage stop before the door of the house, she ran across the garden and rushed into his arms.

"Here you are at last!" said she. "And now, have you done with these mysterious journeys, which cause me such anxiety, and make you leave me so much alone? Never before has your absence made me so unhappy. It has been such a long month! And I must have tormented poor Mrs. Vanwright dreadfully! How clever you have been! And what a wretch that Dr. Plemen was!"

They entered the dining-room, where the cloth was laid, and Witson had not been able

to say a word. He tried to smile at Jane's chatter; but his smile was constrained, and he looked far from happy. Mrs. Vanwright took her accustomed place at table, and her presence, by repressing Jane's demonstrations of affection, enabled Witson to conceal the perturbation of his mind.

The young girl's curiosity was insatiable. She had devoured the accounts of the trial, as it was reported in the newspapers. But that did not content her; and her guardian had to relate to her all the incidents of that criminal drama, which had been so completely cleared up by means of his intelligence, learning, and power of analysis. And at every fresh detail she uttered exclamations of surprise and admiration.

The good governess, who perceived the embarrassment of Witson, endeavoured to calm her pupil, and put a stop to her questions. But she was quite irrepressible; and, great as was Witson's self-control, he at last gave way, and murmured:

"God grant me courage!"

Jane heard him; grew very pale, and anxiously asked him what was the matter, and whether she had said anything to give him pain. She took his hands, which he had

clasped over his face, and, seeing his eyes filled with tears, she added, as she knelt down beside him :

“ Oh, pray, pray forgive me ! ”

And as he fixed on her his sad eyes, and made her no reply, she turned to Mrs. Vanwright, crying :

“ Tell him, do tell him, that if I have said anything to hurt him, it was without intending it ! How could I mean to hurt him, when I love him better than any one else in the world ! ” And she took his hand again, and kissed it.

“ Ah, this is too much, ” exclaimed Witson, as he wrenched himself away. “ I must tell her all ! The hour has come ! ”

Then he added, as he warned her by a gesture not to approach him :

“ My child, listen to me. In a few moments you will know the secret which has tortured me for ten long years ! And terrible as this revelation may be to you, promise not to curse me ; promise me that, if we must separate, you will not quite forget him who has been as a father to you, and who loves you with all his soul ! ”

“ Ah, do not say such things ! ” entreated the girl.

Witson rushed out of the room, and Jane had hardly recovered from her amazement, when he returned and said, as he gave her a manuscript :

"Read that, and when you have read it, be guided entirely by your own heart as to the resolution you come to. I shall not see you again till to-morrow; I have a great deal of writing to do, and I am going to my room now. Good-night, my darling; good-night."

He pressed her to his heart and kissed her tenderly; then summoning all his courage, he pushed her away and fled from the room, and Mrs. Vanwright and Jane heard him enter his study and lock the door.

"What can it all mean?" exclaimed Jane, with tears in her eyes. "What can these papers be about?"

"I do not know," said the good woman, "but you had better obey your guardian; go to your room, read the papers, and then you will know all about it."

"Well, so I will! Good-night, then, Mrs. Vanwright."

With a sad heart Jane left the dining-room and went slowly upstairs. On arriving at her room she hesitated a moment, then, with a trembling hand, she opened the mysterious envelope.

It contained about a dozen pages in Witson's beautiful, firm writing. At the commencement she read: "A criminal error. Philadelphia, May the 1st, 187-."

The name "Philadelphia" awakened in her mind many childish recollections, and she remained for some time in thought; at last she said: "Well, I will do as he wishes; I will read on."

She then began reading the manuscript, of which the last lines alone could reveal to her the terrible secret of the man she loved so well.

"In 187— Dr. Maxwell was one of the most eminent physicians in Philadelphia, although he was then quite young. He had finished his studies in Paris, and had taken his degree there; it was known that he had embraced this noble career from love of science: for his fortune was large, and he made excellent use of it. These reasons had sufficed to place him at the head of the medical profession, and he was universally esteemed. There was but one thing with which people found fault—he did not marry; and when any one spoke to him of some charming young heiress, he would answer, laughing, that for some years he meant to devote himself entirely to his profession.

"In fact, Dr. Maxwell would have had very little time to give to family affections; he was a Professor at the School of Medicine, and Governor of the Children's Hospital. At the hours he gave to seeing patients gratuitously, his house was besieged by poor people, who every-

where extolled his generosity, and he was frequently asked to meet other doctors, in consultation, in various cities of the United States. He was also the great medical authority in all criminal affairs.

"It was in this last capacity that he was one day called before the coroner in the neighbourhood of the docks, relative to a case in which a man, named Jack Summer, a builder's foreman, had died under suspicious circumstances.

"After a rather short and, apparently, not serious illness, Summer had died suddenly in great tortures. His death, however, caused no suspicion, and his funeral took place at the usual time; but, forty-eight hours later, there came a demand for the exhumation of the body from the Star Insurance Company, in which Summer's life had been insured for two thousand dollars. They refused to pay this sum to the widow, and demanded an inquest as to the cause of the illness and death of their client.

"The Company's solicitor affirmed that, according to information he had gathered, Summer had been poisoned by his wife, and that, consequently, the Company could not pay the money to her.

"The inquest which then took place brought up such serious evidence against Mrs. Summer

that she was arrested, notwithstanding her tears, her protestations of innocence, and her ill-health.

"Mrs. Margaret Summer was a rather delicate young woman, of irreproachable character; but it had been observed that, for some time past, she had seemed jealous and ill-tempered. It was known that her husband's conduct had been the cause of this change in her; for, though he was an excellent workman, Summer—a young, strong, and handsome man—was rather given to drink and bad company. Still, he was not a bad husband; and even when tipsy, never abused or ill-treated his wife, but patiently endured her scoldings, and was extremely fond of his little Mary, a sweet child of six or seven years old.

"He had had one serious quarrel with Margaret about this child. Mrs. Summer, who was an Irishwoman, was a fervent Catholic, and wished to bring up her child in that religion; but her husband had opposed it, and used to take the child to church with him.

"That was the state of affairs in the household when the man died so suddenly; and it was in consequence of rumours started by the neighbours that the Star Insurance Company had demanded the inquest, of which one of the consequences was the calling in of Dr. Maxwell to

make the post-mortem examination on the body of Jack Summer.

"The doctor had nothing to do with the good or bad reputation of the woman accused by public rumour; he had but one duty to fulfil—he had no business to concern himself with extraneous questions—and it was thus that Stephen Maxwell acted. Without going into technical details of the examination here, it will suffice to say that his report was overwhelming as regarded the poisoning of the deceased by verdigris. An appreciable quantity of copper was found in the organs of the victim, and the doctor asserted that this copper could only exist in a human body by having been administered during life.

"Armed with this report, the coroner pursued the investigation. He discovered in the Summers' house two copper vessels, on the sides of which were traces of verdigris which had been scraped off with the point of a knife, and a bottle of pickles, in which was a knitting-needle that, by the action of the vinegar, had become poisonous.

"These were considered sufficient proofs of the murder of Summer by a person who had been constantly about him; and in virtue of the axiom, *Is fecit cui prodest*, it must be the



wife who was guilty, since, by her husband's death, she would obtain the two thousand dollars of insurance money.

" Besides this, Dr. Sterton, who had attended Summer, and treated him for internal inflammation, said he had been struck by the frequent vomitings of his patient; and that, though at the moment of his death he had not thought of crime, the post-mortem convinced him that he had been mistaken in his diagnosis. On thinking over the various symptoms of the deceased, he saw that he might have died from a slow and continuous absorption of salts of copper.

" In consequence of this evidence, Margaret Summer was committed for trial on the charge of poisoning her husband.

" But the case was not destined to be tried; for Margaret, immediately after her incarceration, became seriously ill, and died as much from the effects of despair and grief as from the phthisis by which she was attacked.

" Her unexpected decease caused, in the neighbourhood where the Summers had lived, a complete revulsion of feeling. There was a cry of calumny, and those who had given evidence against the poor woman, as well as the Insurance Office, only escaped being severely handled by having a strong guard of police placed for their protection.

"Then the people bethought them that Margaret had left a little girl of six or seven years, whom charitable neighbours had taken care of; and a subscription was raised to place her in a school, where she could remain till she was grown up: for, though the guilt of the mother was not proved, law expenses had absorbed all the property; even the furniture had been sold to provide for this purpose.

"When Dr. Maxwell was informed of these events, he felt the deepest emotion. Of course his conscience did not accuse him, for he had performed his part with the care he gave to all his professional duties. But he considered it was very unfortunate that Mrs. Summer should not have been tried; because, although he had found copper in the organs of the deceased, it did not necessarily follow that it should have been administered by the wife. And yet the death of the unfortunate woman rendered it impossible that the truth could ever be known, and her memory remain for ever dishonoured. Notwithstanding the popular belief, her child would remain the daughter of a supposed criminal; and, as the Insurance Company would not pay, the girl was likely to be the victim, not only of shame, but of poverty.

"Was not this a great injustice? Jack Summer had insured his life for the benefit of

both his wife and daughter; and, as Mrs. Summer had not been proved guilty, ought she not to be considered by the Company as innocent, and ought not her daughter to inherit the insurance money?

"This question so preoccupied Dr. Maxwell, that, growing interested in the poor little girl, he made a personal appeal to the Star; but the directors received his application so unfavourably, that he resolved to have recourse to law, as soon as he should have got Mrs. Summer's child from the neighbours who had taken charge of it.

"Affairs were in this condition when the American papers reproduced the scientific discussion which had arisen in consequence of the death sentence having been passed on a chemist at St. Denis, near Paris, named Moreau. This man had appeared before the court of assizes of the Seine, under the charge of having poisoned his two wives with verdigris; and after his condemnation and execution, certain skilful men had asserted that, if Moreau had got rid of his wives by poison, it certainly was not by the verdigris which the experts had found in the organs of the victims.

"One learned practitioner went even farther; for, arguing from the discoveries of some of

his eminent brethren—discoveries made long previous to the Moreau tragedy—he demonstrated conclusively that, if the absorption of verdigris be in a certain measure detrimental to health, it cannot possibly cause death by its own toxicological properties.

“This discussion was just of the nature to trouble the conscience of Stephen Maxwell. He followed up all its phases with growing interest; and, when he had made himself acquainted with all the reports, and with all the pamphlets published concerning this matter—when he had made a new examination of the organs of Summer—he became convinced that, like the doctors who had testified to poisoning by verdigris in Moreau’s case, he too had made a mistake in saying the same thing concerning the death of Mrs. Summer’s husband. Then he felt absolute despair; for though the unfortunate woman had not been condemned, she had died in prison of despair, shame, and privation; her memory was branded, her daughter reduced to misery and dishonour. And it was he—the eminent doctor, the much-honoured *savant*, the honourable man—who had committed this dreadful error! Then it must be his part to do all that lay in his power to repair it.

"Having taken this resolution, Stephen Maxwell gave himself up entirely to the work he had imposed upon himself.

"First of all—sacrificing his reputation for infallibility—he published a report in which he frankly owned his mistake, thus completely rehabilitating the memory of Margaret Summer; then he caused a monument to be erected to her memory, and he adopted her daughter.

"Then, abandoning his high position in Philadelphia, he sentenced himself to dedicate several years of his life, to treating poor patients gratuitously, and to watching criminal cases, and being always ready to fight against medical and judicial errors.

"Thus for many years has Dr. Maxwell lived faithful to his vow; but he knows not if he has yet expiated his fault, for Margaret's daughter is near him, and he can only know from that child, herself, if she will pardon him for the death of her mother.

"Then only he who has been called William Dow, Charles Murray, and William Witson will believe he has the right to resume the name of Stephen Maxwell, at the same time that his adopted daughter Jane resumes that of Mary Summer."

These words terminated the manuscript,

which Jane read with tearful eyes, for she had not needed to read to the end of the painful story to understand who were the real characters of it.

"My poor mother!" she exclaimed, as she tried to remember the face of her from whom she had been so cruelly separated.

Then she knelt down and addressed to Heaven a fervent prayer; and feeling calmer, she said, but this time with a smile:

"How he, too, must have suffered! My mother herself, were she living, would bid me love him!"

Then suddenly bethinking herself that William, on leaving her, had sadly said, "I will see you to-morrow," she exclaimed:

"I will not wait so long to reassure him, to save him from despair! He loves me. I know he does!"

And flying down the stairs she knocked at the door of Witson's study, saying:

"It is I, dear friend, it is I!"

The door opened, and Jane rushed into the trembling arms of William.

"Of all the past I know but one thing, Stephen Maxwell," said she, in accents of love; "it is your devotedness, your grief, your affection for me, who love you as you deserve to

be loved. Whenever you like we will go to Philadelphia, and, hand in hand, we will pray at the grave of poor Margaret Summer, my unhappy mother!"

With radiant eyes, Stephen Maxwell answered only by pressing her to his heart.

One month after the events that we have just related, the principal personages in this story were grouped about the deck of the *Pereire* (the splendid steamer had just left Havre); they were Mr. Panton, his two daughters, the Reverend Jonathan, Felix Barthey, Stephen Maxwell, and his ward. They were all going to America.

Mr. Panton had recovered his rosy colour and his cheerfulness; the clergyman, still pale and meagre, still raised his eyes and hands heavenward, as though in thankfulness at quitting a country where he had been able to convert no one to the doctrines of Swedenborg; Rhea, leaning against the bulwarks, seemed, on the contrary, to be casting a regretful glance at the receding shores of France, where she had undergone such dreadful things; and Barthey was entirely occupied with Jenny, who was leaning on his arm, just as Jane was resting on the arm of Maxwell.

The American doctor and his ward, who was soon to become his wife, had come on board at the last moment ; but we may imagine with what joy they were welcomed by those who owed them so much.

The lighthouses at La Hève were sinking below the horizon, and our friends began to think about looking after their comfort on board ; Mr. Panton and Jonathan, thinking nothing about the poetry of Ocean, had gone down long before to see after their cabins. Just then Maxwell approached Madame Gould-Parker, whom Rhea had rejoined ; and seeing, with the two sisters, a nurse, holding a baby, which Jenny was wrapping up in an embroidered pelisse, he could not help an exclamation of surprise, which did not escape the colonel's widow.

Then, blushing and smiling, she said :

"My son, Maurice !"

"Your son," said the doctor. "Excuse me ! I did not know——"

And as Felix Barthey also smiled, Maxwell exclaimed :

"Ah, I understand now ! My dear child, excuse me !"

"His name is Maurice," resumed Jenny, "and he was born in that terrible night of the 22nd of September, during which Rhea never left me



for a moment. She has never allowed me to make the slightest explanation as to the real cause of her leaving Vermel that night; she would not even let me tell you, although it would have been absolute proof of her innocence. She risked her own honour, to save my honour and my life." Jenny clasped Rhea in her arms, and kissing her, repeated, again and again: "Rhea, my darling sister!"

Maxwell felt great admiration for Rhea's conduct; he took her hand, and pressing it to his lips, he said:

"You are a worthy daughter of our fearless race, and I can well understand that unhappy man loving you to madness!"

These words, which reminded Rhea of so many dreadful things, made her shudder.

From feelings of humanity and professional pride, Maxwell had only told her that her husband's death was caused by a terrible mistake, and not by an odious crime; so that Madame Deblain carried away with her from France a feeling of pity, and perhaps something more, for the man who, having decided to sacrifice his life in expiation of his crime, had yet so well guarded the secret of the birth of Jenny's child.

Six months later Madame Gould-Parker became Madame Barthey, and, long before, Jane

had married Stephen Maxwell, whose return to Philadelphia was hailed by the poor and unfortunate.

All that now remains for us to do is to inform our readers what became of the members of the court of Vermel who figured in this judicial drama, whilst our amateur detective was enjoying in America his well-earned happiness.

M. de la Marnière, a victim of political intrigue, was the first to be dismissed ; the dignity and independence of thought which he had shown in the Deblain affair, making him a conspicuous mark ; but when he returned to private life, he returned to it with a lofty place in public opinion.

The rest of our characters had various fortunes : the chief justice Monsel remained at the head of the Court of Vermel ; M. Lachaussée now left to others the defence of those who had formerly profited by his *remarkable* eloquence ; M. Duret was no longer public prosecutor, and the ambitious Babou kept waiting, but with much weakened hopes, to be appointed chief judge, or to receive the cross of the Legion of Honour.

In the Place Vendôme, or wherever may reside the head of the Government, tact and the absence of personal feeling are considered of as

much importance as professional probity ; therefore MM. Duret and Babou were not easily pardoned for their blundering in the Deblain case ; for, though Ministries pass away, written accounts of trials do not.

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